



**Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive**

---

Theses and Dissertations

Thesis Collection

---

1983

## The Royal Navy and British security policy.

Oldham, James Edmond.

Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School

---

<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/19973>



Calhoun is a project of the Dudley Knox Library at NPS, furthering the precepts and goals of open government and government transparency. All information contained herein has been approved for release by the NPS Public Affairs Officer.

**Dudley Knox Library / Naval Postgraduate School**  
**411 Dyer Road / 1 University Circle**  
**Monterey, California USA 93943**

<http://www.nps.edu/library>









# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

Monterey, California



## THESIS

THE ROYAL NAVY AND BRITISH SECURITY POLICY

by

James Edmond Oldham

December 1983

Thesis Advisor:

D. S. Yost

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

T215659





REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) The Royal Navy and British Security Policy		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED Master's Thesis; December 1983
		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
7. AUTHOR(s) James Edmond Oldham		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California 93943		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California 93943		12. REPORT DATE December 1983
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 118
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report)  UNCLASSIFIED
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report)  Approved for public release; distribution unlimited		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Britain                                      sea lines of communication Royal Navy                                  northern flank roles    Falklands War nuclear deterrent                          resources constraints		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) This thesis examines the roles of the Royal Navy in British security policy. Since World War Two, Britain's role in the international system has changed and so has its security policy. Today Britain plays a part in the nuclear balance of power; is a major contributor to NATO and West European collective security; and has diminished but still significant interests beyond Europe. The Royal Navy contributes to each of these dimensions of		





Britain's defense policy. It operates Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent. Its conventional forces contribute to Britain's European commitment, though the Navy's role is currently considered less significant than that of the British Army and the RAF. Finally, the Royal Navy plays a role in protecting Britain's residual global interests such as the Falklands. The future of the Navy is ultimately dependent upon the constraints which limit defense resources. In the future the Royal Navy will continue to operate the strategic nuclear deterrent; will contribute to Britain's European role with diminished capability; and slowly but inevitably further reduce its commitments beyond Europe.



Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

The Royal Navy and British Security Policy

by

James Edmond Oldham  
Lieutenant, United States Navy  
B.S., United States Naval Academy, 1978

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

from the

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

December 1983

---



## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the roles of the Royal Navy in British security policy. Since World War Two, Britain's role in the international system has changed and so has its security policy. Today Britain plays a part in the nuclear balance of power; is a major contributor to NATO and West European collective security; and has diminished but still significant interests beyond Europe. The Royal Navy contributes to each of these dimensions of Britain's defense policy. It operates Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent. Its conventional forces contribute to Britain's European commitment, though the Navy's role is currently considered less significant than that of the British Army and the RAF. Finally, the Royal Navy plays a role in protecting Britain's residual global interests such as the Falklands. The future of the Navy is ultimately dependent upon the constraints which limit defense resources. In the future the Royal Navy will continue to operate the strategic nuclear deterrent; will contribute to Britain's European role with diminished capability; and slowly but inevitably further reduce its commitments beyond Europe.





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION -----	7
II.	GREAT BRITAIN'S ROLE IN THE POSTWAR WORLD -----	10
	A. BRITAIN AND THE NUCLEAR BALANCE -----	14
	B. BRITAIN AND EUROPE -----	21
	C. BRITAIN AND THE WORLD -----	26
	FOOTNOTES -----	37
III.	THE ROYAL NAVY AND THE BRITISH NUCLEAR DETERRENT ---	39
	A. POLARIS -----	40
	B. THE NEED FOR A REPLACEMENT -----	42
	C. THE CRUISE MISSILE ALTERNATIVE -----	44
	D. TRIDENT -----	46
	FOOTNOTES -----	50
IV.	THE ROYAL NAVY AND GREAT BRITAIN'S EUROPEAN COMMITMENT -----	52
	A. THE ROYAL NAVY'S HISTORICAL ROLE TOWARD EUROPE -	53
	B. THE NAVAL THREAT -----	57
	C. THE ROYAL NAVY'S PRESENT ROLE IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC -----	59
	D. ALTERNATIVE ROLES FOR THE ROYAL NAVY -----	66
	E. THE NAVY'S FORCE STRUCTURE -----	71
	F. THE ROYAL NAVY AND ITS ALLIES -----	77
	FOOTNOTES -----	81
V.	THE ROYAL NAVY BEYOND EUROPE -----	85
	A. THE TRADITIONAL ROLE BEYOND EUROPE -----	83
	B. END OF THE GLOBAL NAVY -----	84



C.	THE NAVY'S ROLE BEYOND EUROPE SINCE 1971 -----	86
D.	THE FALKLANDS WAR -----	87
	FOOTNOTES -----	93
VI.	THE ROYAL NAVY IN AN ERA OF CONSTRAINED RESOURCES --	94
A.	CONSTRAINTS -----	95
B.	COMPETITION WITH THE OTHER SERVICES -----	102
C.	COMPETITION WITHIN THE NAVY -----	108
	FOOTNOTES -----	113
VII.	CONCLUSIONS -----	115
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST -----	118



## I. INTRODUCTION

On May 31, 1916, Admiral Sir John Jellicoe steamed into battle off Jutland with one of the greatest fighting forces in history, the British Grand Fleet. Boasting twenty-eight dreadnought battleships and nine battlecruisers as well as over ninety cruisers and destroyers, this fleet marked the zenith of British naval power. The spirit of Drake, Effingham, Hood, Rodney, Howe, and Nelson, and a tradition of 300 years of naval supremacy were embodied in that fleet. Britannia ruled the waves around the world.

Sixty-six years later Rear Admiral Sandy Woodward went into battle off the Falkland Islands with what was now the embodiment of British seapower: one old helicopter/VSTOL carrier due for retirement, one light carrier already sold to Australia and just over a dozen destroyers and frigates. Britannia ruled the waves around those remote islands only with great difficulty.

The decline of the Royal Navy has not occurred in a vacuum, but has merely been a symptom of the great historical decline of Britain as a world power. The economic growth of Germany and the United States, the impact of two world wars, the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as super-powers, and the development of nuclear weapons have profoundly altered Britain's economic, political, and military roles in the world.



The seeds of the Navy's decline were being sown even as Jellicoe engaged the German High Seas Fleet in battle. The United States and Japan were beginning naval build-up programs that spurred a postwar naval race. Britain finished the war with a large but obsolescent fleet, and war costs made competing in a new naval race out of the question. The race was halted until the late 1930's by the 1922 Washington Naval Conference but Britain, by accepting a 5:5:3 ratio in capital ships, had acknowledged United States naval equality.

World War Two proved a traumatic experience for the Royal Navy, and profoundly altered its role in the world. As in the First World War, the German U-boat threat again nearly knocked Britain out of the war. The Navy found its forces overstretched by commitments. In addition to containing German raiders and combatting U-boats, the Navy fought a very close-run campaign in the Mediterranean, all with a Navy which only numbered a fourth of the capital ships which it had had in the previous war. When Japan threatened the British position in the Far East, the Royal Navy was unable to send the fleet promised during the interwar period. As a result, Japan swept through Malaya and Burma and seized Singapore. By 1945, the Royal Navy's battlefleet, which had entered the war unsurpassed in strength by any other navy, was only another task force in the United States Pacific Fleet. America now ruled the waves.

After the war, the Royal Navy adjusted to its position as the second largest navy in the world, but by the Sixties





it found itself surpassed by the Soviet Navy as well. The end of the Empire and a series of financial retrenchments further reduced the Navy till by the 1980s it was barely keeping ahead of the French fleet.

The present roles of the Royal Navy in British security policy are a reflection of Britain's role in the world. That role can best be examined in three principal areas, that of the nuclear deterrent, European collective security, and global interests and commitments. It is within these three areas that the Navy finds its roles. The Royal Navy is the primary operator of Britain's strategic deterrent. The Royal Navy's conventional forces make up the largest European navy in NATO's force structure, and the Navy bears the principal burden of projecting British power beyond Europe. The relationship between these roles, however, is shaped not only by military strategy and requirements, but the severe constraints placed on British resources. Nevertheless, the Royal Navy continues to play an important role in Britain's nuclear deterrent, the British contribution to NATO and European security, and Britain's reduced but still significant global interests.



## II. GREAT BRITAIN'S ROLE IN THE POSTWAR WORLD

Great Britain entered the twentieth century as the most powerful nation in the world. The British Empire covered a fourth of the world's land surface and ruled a third of its population. The Royal Navy ruled the waves, as it had for over 300 years. London was the world's financial center, as British industry and trade had made Britain the richest nation in the world. Queen Victoria, in the sixty-third year of her reign, symbolized the continuity and prestige of British power. After eighty-five years of Pax Britannica, the British entered the new century supremely confident.

As Britain enters the 1980's its position in the world is a far cry from that eighty years earlier. The once mighty British Empire now consists only of the British Isles (minus most of Ireland), Gibraltar, Hong Kong, the Falklands, and a few assorted islands in the Pacific, Indian and South Atlantic Oceans. The United States and the Soviet Union now vie for status as the most powerful nation in the world, each boasting many times Britain's power. Economically, Britain has become the "sick man of Europe."<sup>1</sup> The power and prestige of Victorian England is now only a memory.

The roots of Britain's decline go back to the middle of the nineteenth century, when the industrial revolution spread to other nations. The United States and Germany above all



industrialized on a scale which threatened to dwarf British industry. The British economic advantage was clearly eroding by the time war broke out in 1914.

The First World War was the first of the great traumas which brought Britain to her present status. Over 900,000 Britons were killed and another 2,000,000 wounded, compromising much of Britain's future leadership. War costs and damages of nearly US \$52 billion<sup>2</sup> changed Britain from a creditor nation to a debtor nation. Although Germany had been temporarily eliminated as an economic and military rival, the United States was now the world's creditor with by far the world's richest economy. Finally, the Royal Navy's failure to fulfill the Trafalgar legend by destroying the German High Seas Fleet at Jutland brought into question the credibility of British naval supremacy, the bedrock on which British power rested. An exhausted Great Britain's decline had begun.

During the interwar years the British attempted to carry on as before, yet the cracks in British power continued to grow. Faced with an intense naval race between the United States and Japan in which Britain could not compete, the British government agreed at the 1922 Washington Naval Conference to a 5:5:3 ratio of capital ships for Britain, the United States, and Japan respectively. Thus, by acknowledging U.S. naval equality, Great Britain's 300 year-old tradition of naval supremacy ended. In India, a nationalist movement led by M. K. Gandhi threatened British rule at the very heart





of the Empire. At home, economic problems, particularly the Great Depression, sapped the confidence of the British people. The events of the late 1930's, in which Britain lacked the will or ability to stop Hitler, demonstrated the fundamental weakness of the nation. By 1939 Britain was even weaker than in 1918.

In 1939, Britain found itself at war again. This Second World War proved even more traumatic for Britain than the first. The BEF was driven from the continent and the British Isles threatened with invasion. British cities were pounded by the Luftwaffe. As in the First World War, German U-boats threatened the British with starvation, while the Royal Navy found itself overstretched by its commitments. Substantial territories of the British Empire were overrun by the Japanese. Although Britain was victorious, victory was due more to the destruction of the Wehrmacht in the Soviet Union and the massive intervention of the United States. Indeed, after Normandy, Britain's role as an ally equal to the United States and the Soviet Union steadily declined. Finally, the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by atomic weapons brought into the international arena a new yardstick by which national power would be measured, and Britain did not have these weapons. If Britain had at least shared the top rung of power in 1939, by 1945 it was now on the second rung. British power was clearly fading.



After the war emerged a new world order dominated by two "superpowers", the United States and the Soviet Union. Britain sought to maintain a role one notch below the two superpowers. However, chronic and severe economic problems at home and growing nationalism throughout the Empire made such a position increasingly untenable. What was followed in the nearly four decades since the Second World War have been repeated attempts to maintain as strong a position as possible while repeatedly attempting to redefine Great Britain's role in the world. Dean Acheson's oft quoted view that "Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role"<sup>4</sup> has continued to be true as Britain continues to retreat from its former position of power.

As Britain moves through the 1980's it continues to play a role in three major arenas of power, the nuclear balance, the European continent, and to a much lesser extent the world stage. The size of the British roles in these areas continues to change as the Government continues to make decisions concerning the allotment of scarce resources. Therefore, the British role must be tailored to fit the available national power.

Britain, as a global power in decline, has reduced its role in the international political system to match its decline in national power. Accordingly, Britain maintains a small but significant stake in the nuclear balance of power, a substantial position in West European security, and a small, but not negligible role worldwide.



## A. BRITAIN AND THE NUCLEAR BALANCE

Nuclear weapons have played a central role in British security policy since 1945. Whether or not Britain should be a nuclear power, and if so, what form its nuclear force should take has been and continues to be a major issue for the British government and people.

British involvement with nuclear weapons goes back to the Second World War, when the British assisted with the Manhattan Project. Although Churchill and Roosevelt had a private agreement by which the United States would share its atomic secrets with Britain, that arrangement died with Roosevelt. The MacMahon Act of 1946 prevented the sharing of atomic secrets with any nation, including the United Kingdom. Although the American need for uranium from Britain's African colonies caused a loosening of restrictions in 1947, another decade passed before general sharing between the two nations took place. Therefore, Britain was largely dependent on its own resources to develop atomic weapons. This it did, exploding its first atomic bomb on October 3, 1952, and its first hydrogen weapon on May 15, 1957. Britain had joined the nuclear club.

Having joined that exclusive club, Britain then set out to develop a nuclear force. Its roots lay in the Global Strategic Paper of 1952, which emphasized both a strategic nuclear airstrike capability and a tactical nuclear capability. The result was the V-bomber force of the 1950's based on the



VULCAN, VICTOR and VALIANT bombers. Although cooperation with the American SAC was envisioned from the beginning, the force did allow the British some independence. The V-bombers continued to provide the backbone of the British nuclear deterrent until the late 1960's.

Britain's desire to modernize and update its nuclear forces led ultimately to technical dependence on the United States. SPUTNIK and the development of ballistic missiles caused the British government to begin development of a British land-based missile, the BLUE STREAK. The expense of such a program, however, combined with growing financial constraints to cause the cancellation of the program in 1960. Instead, the decision was made to purchase the American SKYBOLT long-range Air-to-Surface missile then under development. Great Britain was becoming dependent upon U.S. weapons technology.

Britain's dependence on the United States has dramatically demonstrated by the SKYBOLT Affair. The SKYBOLT came to represent for the British their future as a nuclear power and the centerpiece of Britain's military security. For the United States, however, it was only another of a myriad of strategic weapons in development or production. To Kennedy and MacNamara, the decision to cancel the SKYBOLT program in 1962 was only a measure to improve the cost-effectiveness of U.S. defense spending without any real weakening of the American strategic force. For MacMillan and his government,





however, the decision was a betrayal by Britain's closest ally and left the British nuclear force with a questionable future. The problem was solved at the Nassau Conference in December, 1962, when Kennedy offered MacMillan POLARIS. The arrangement, by which the United States provided POLARIS missiles and technical assistance on submarine construction while the British built the submarines and nuclear warheads themselves, gave the British an even more effective and secure nuclear force than SKYBOLT, but made dependence on the United States for nuclear weapons technology a permanent feature of British defense policy.

The rationale behind the British nuclear force has remained essentially unchanged since its inception. Despite the peculiarly British lack of detailed public justification for nuclear weapons,<sup>5</sup> several reasons have been given at various times by British leaders which give insight into the thinking of Great Britain's policy elites.

The first reason for acquiring nuclear weapons was the prestige and status which nuclear weapons confer on a nation. Initially, British leaders saw nuclear weapons as a way to maintain a degree of equality with the other nuclear powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. As other nations have also acquired nuclear weapons and the nuclear arsenals of the two superpowers have dwarfed the British arsenal, Britain's weapons still make the British a party to many nuclear matters. Also, Britain possesses a certain status as



the only European nuclear power in the integrated NATO military structure. "Below the positions of the superpowers, the British - like the French - realized that nuclear weapons could be used to differentiate their nation from almost all others in the world."<sup>6</sup> The prestige and self-confidence which nuclear weapons give Britain continue to motivate British leaders toward maintaining membership in the nuclear club.

Secondly, a British nuclear force provided insurance should the United States again fail to become directly involved in a European War. In the immediate postwar years, memories of 1939-1941 greatly affected British perceptions of America's attitude toward Europe. Since that time, however, little has been publicly said by the government about such a scenario. While DeGaulle was loudly proclaiming the American nuclear guarantee was no longer viable, successive British governments have continued to express complete confidence in the American promises. Instead, the British have cloaked their "Gaullist" feelings by suggesting their deterrent prevents the Soviets from "miscalculating" that the U.S. guarantee was no longer viable and therefore starting a war. Recently, however, some have hinted at the possibility of an American loss of will, particularly in light of Soviet strategic parity. Yet, the value Britain places on its relationship with the United States will continue to keep such concerns more a private than public justification for the British strategic deterrent.



A third justification, closely related to the second, is the value of an independent center for decisionmaking. The British feel that more centers of nuclear decisionmaking in the Western Alliance increase the uncertainty for and therefore deterrence of the Soviet Union. Initially the British also claimed that their targeting priorities might vary from the Americans', such as naval bases and submarine pens, but with the growth of the U.S. arsenal and the decline of British seapower, such explanations have become outmoded. Independent decisionmaking does, however, require the Soviets to pay particular attention to British motives and interests. Accordingly, although the British strategic force is assigned to NATO, the British government reserves for itself the decision on when to go nuclear and under what circumstances that decision would be made. Despite its technical dependence on the United States, the British deterrent is controlled solely by the British themselves, a fact which continues to justify its existence.

A fourth reason for a British nuclear force borrows from the French "proportional deterrence" philosophy. Essentially, the British hold that their force could do more damage to an attacker, i.e. the Soviet Union, than would justify any gains he would derive from destroying the United Kingdom. Former Secretary of State for Defense John Nott stated in 1982, "Deterrence, and preventing war, is a matter of showing that the risks involved in starting a war are seen by a potential



aggressor as far greater than any possible gains he could hope to achieve."<sup>7</sup> As long as the British deterrent remains on relatively invulnerable submarines, and retains the ability to penetrate Soviet defenses (as the CHEVALINE warhead improvement program and the TRIDENT program intends to maintain), this form of reasoning provides sound justification for such a force.

Support for Britain's nuclear deterrent has generally been bi-partisan, though not unanimous. In the Labour Party particularly, there has always been an anti-nuclear and anti-military faction, motivated by pacifism, sympathy for the Soviet Union, or the desire for more social spending. A segment of the British populace in general has held objections to nuclear weapons on moral grounds. The anti-nuclear movement reached its peak in the late 1950's when the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament gained enough influence to get a resolution in favor of unilateral nuclear disarmament passed by the 1960 Labour Party Conference. The Party leadership, however, was cool to disarmament and succeeded in eliminating it from the Party agenda. When Labour achieved power in 1964, the Wilson Government continued the nuclear weapons policies of the Tories without much outcry. Nuclear disarmament lost public prominence during the 1960's and 1970's, but the early 1980's have seen a resurgence of the anti-nuclear movement. Though this movement opposes TRIDENT, it appears more immediately aimed at American nuclear arms in Europe rather than British weapons,





and the Thatcher Government's plans to acquire TRIDENT have met with less public outcry than U.S.-controlled weapons. Despite the shift to the left of Labour, the chances that the strife-torn party will take power and alter British nuclear policy in the near future are dim. As long as the Tory Government remains committed to TRIDENT and there is no mass public opposition to a British deterrent, Britain will remain a nuclear power.

Britain's involvement with arms control has been mixed. The British were strong advocates for the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty. Although the British government still supports a comprehensive test-ban treaty, its ardor for such a treaty has been cooled by the necessity to develop warheads for a successor to POLARIS. The British are also sensitive to charges that their American nuclear relationship violates the Non-Proliferation Treaty, though Britain builds its own warheads. Finally Britain refuses to take part in SALT, START, or any negotiations on its own strategic forces, unless the Soviet nuclear arsenal is significantly reduced, as the British force is too small to stand any reductions in the face of overwhelming Soviet superiority.

The future of Britain as a nuclear power will depend on its ability to provide financial support for its force. Once built, the British POLARIS fleet has proved very economical in service and will remain effective through the 1980's. Whether Britain's declining resources will support the



construction of a replacement remains to be seen. The TRIDENT decision, by which the British would build the submarines and warheads, while the United States would provide missiles and technical assistance, provides the British with the most cost-effective long-term replacement.<sup>8</sup> The Thatcher Government is determined to procure the system, but past governments have been forced to cancel "sacred" programs due to economic stringencies. The future of the British deterrent, as the rest of the defense establishment, will depend on the success of the Government in improving Britain's economic position. Ultimately, however, Britain will remain dependent on the American nuclear arsenal, in which it has placed so much faith.

#### B. BRITAIN AND EUROPE

One of the greatest changes in Britain's foreign policy since the Second World War has been in the nature of its relationship with Europe. Its policy toward Europe reflects not only its view toward its allies, but also its self-image as to its own role in Western security.

Historically, Britain has tried to remain aloof from European affairs, becoming involved only when one power threatened to achieve continental hegemony. Britain would then align itself with the opponents of that power, forming coalitions to stop it. The separation provided by the English Channel combined with the Royal Navy to protect the British Isles from invasion, while preventing any power from gaining hegemony insured that the Europeans would be too pre-occupied



with continental affairs to seriously threaten the British Empire. British foreign policy continued to be guided by these principles until the end of the Second World War.

The realities of the post-war world ended any hopes of "splendid isolation." Totalitarian control of Poland, which Britain had fought Germany to prevent, was now accomplished by the Soviet Union. The decline of the Royal Navy, the development of airpower during the war, and the atomic bomb greatly reduced the military value of the Channel. Finally, Britain's decline relative to the United States and the Soviet Union ultimately made Britain dependent on the United States for its security.

In adjusting to this situation British policy has been characterized by two frequently contrary trends. One trend has been for a greater British involvement with and closer ties to its West European allies. The other trend has been for Britain to maintain a special position separate from Europe and closer to the United States. These two trends continue to the present in shaping Anglo-European relations.

In the immediate post-war period, wartime experience combined with British perception of the Soviet threat in Central Europe to make the idea of a European coalition very popular in the United Kingdom. Winston Churchill himself proposed a United States of Europe in 1946 at Zurich. Accordingly, the British took a leading role in establishing both the Brussels Treaty of 1948 and the NATO Treaty a year



later. Furthermore, Britain committed a sizable military force to a permanent position on the continent. This step marked a great change over all previous British security policy. The British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) was originally 77,000 men, but was reduced to 55,000 in the late 1950's as an economy measure. The BAOR and RAF Germany were established initially to contain German revanchism as much as any Soviet moves. By the mid 1950's, however, the Soviet threat had sufficiently supplanted the German threat to a degree that Britain supported the re-armament of West Germany. The BAOR had come to symbolize not only Great Britain's commitment to preventing a Soviet move against the West, but also Britain's involvement with its NATO allies and its interest in maintaining a leading role in the NATO alliance. With the elimination of Britain's global commitments, the BAOR has come to demand an ever growing percentage of British defense spending. The Thatcher Government's decision to drastically reduce the Royal Navy in order to maintain the BAOR is evidence of the priority now placed on the NATO commitment. The British military commitment in Central Europe continues to be a major feature of British security policy.

British involvement with Europe has not only been military but economic as well. Britain's traditional dependence on foreign trade and the dissolution of the Empire as an economic unit (which the Commonwealth could not prevent) caused Britain to turn toward Europe. In the late 1950's,





however, Great Britain still had sufficient economic ties to the Empire and Commonwealth that it balked at the European Economic Community (EEC) and its common external tariff. Instead it established the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which consisted of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Portugal, Austria, and Switzerland as well as the United Kingdom. The EFTA, however, lacked the economic potential or political bonds to be a rival to the EEC<sup>9</sup>, so by 1961 the MacMillan Government reversed the earlier decision to stay out of the EEC and began negotiations to enter. These went on until 1963 when De Gaulle, claiming the British were not "European" enough, announced he would veto British entry into the Community. A second attempt in the late 1960's by Harold Wilson met with a similar rebuff. But by 1971, De Gaulle was gone and French fears of German dominance of the EEC allowed the Heath Government to successfully petition for entry. In 1973, Britain joined the EEC and became as economically committed to Europe as it was militarily.

Britain's involvement with Europe has not had unanimous domestic support, and several reasons both for and against a European orientation have appeared in policy debates. Britain's NATO membership, and the United States' membership, has committed the United States to Britain's defense, an accomplishment considered by many to be the greatest achievement of British foreign policy in this century.<sup>10</sup> With the Soviet Union perceived as the major threat, the BAOR is seen as the



best way to contribute directly to containing that threat. Also, the British presence on the continent gives it influence in European affairs. Many British leaders, particularly in the Conservative Party, have shown support for European Unity as a goal in itself. This would give Britain a degree of independence from the United States, and support for it has fed on some anti-American feeling among the Tories as a result of the process of de-colonization and the Suez Crisis.<sup>11</sup> It is significant that both the initial attempt to enter the EEC and the final entry occurred during Tory governments. The one attempt made by a Labour Government received the support of the opposition party. Though Labour now opposes EEC membership, the pro-European view has been the dominant view of British policy.

Opposition to a greater role in Europe has continued, particularly on the size of the military commitment and EEC membership. Early arguments that the European commitment undermined Britain's global position and its "special relationship" with the United States have largely disappeared as a result of the loss of Empire and decline of British power. However, now that economic stringencies have forced the Government to reduce the Royal Navy in order to maintain the forces in Germany, opposition has grown - particularly in the Labour Party - to such a move. Indeed, Labour has become the "Navy Party"!<sup>12</sup> Many traditionalists of both parties have expressed misgivings about abandoning Britain's naval traditions



for a continental position. In the aftermath of the Falklands War, such opposition may eventually result in a reduction of the Central European forces in favor of the Navy. On the economic front, considerable dissatisfaction with the EEC exists, particularly its agricultural pricing policies. Labour, which has always been suspicious of the EEC as a threat to domestic jobs, has particularly expressed unhappiness over the EEC. This discontent has effectively ended any serious hopes of European unity.<sup>13</sup> Concern over the costs of maintaining the BAOR and unhappiness over the EEC do not seriously threaten Britain's role in Europe, but do present the possibility that it may limit the scope of British involvement in the future.

However, Britain's future will continue to be in Europe. Although a desire to have a global view exists, and enthusiasm for the EEC has cooled, the decline of Britain's power, the end of Empire, and the presence of the Soviet Union in Central Europe will continue to make Europe the principal focal point of British foreign policy.

#### C. BRITAIN AND THE WORLD

One of the most dramatic historical events of the post-war world has been the dissolution of the British Empire. In only twenty-five years history's greatest empire disappeared. Although this was accomplished over an amazingly short period of time and with amazingly little strife, it was by no means



a smooth, orderly, well-planned retreat. The collapse of the Empire and its aftermath have defined British global policy since 1945.

Despite Britain's weakened condition after 1945, most British leaders felt that maintenance of the Empire was both possible and desirable. For the Tories, who were the traditional party of Empire, support for maintaining it was natural. For Labour, the party in power, sympathies were more ambiguous. Traditionally, the socialist-oriented Labourites had regarded the Empire as capitalist exploitation. Yet they were also British patriots comfortable with the habits of Empire.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, they were able to find a moral justification for Empire. "There had always been two strains, contrary strains, in British imperialism - the rough aggressive strain and the other, more liberal one, which sought genuinely to provide sound administration for under-developed peoples."<sup>15</sup> Labourites felt it their moral duty to prepare their colonies for self-rule (and spread socialism to these colonies), a process which would proceed slowly and carefully. As colonies received self-rule, they would remain bound to the crown by the Commonwealth, which up to then had only consisted of ethnically British nations such as Australia and New Zealand. (South Africa, although not predominantly British ethnically, was at least dominated by European peoples.) The first non-ethnically British colony to be granted self-rule would be the "greatest jewel of the Empire," India.





The granting of independence to India set the pattern of retreat from Empire. India had become ungovernable as a result of Gandhi's campaign of civil disobedience and the non-violent aspects of Indian nationalism convinced many that India was ready for self-government. Accordingly, Prime Minister Clement Atlee sent Lord Mountbatten, an aristocratic war hero with pro-Labour sympathies to India as Viceroy to end the Raj. India would become a member of the Commonwealth, though without recognizing the Crown as head-of-state. The terms by which India entered, however, were such that the Commonwealth soon evolved, with addition of other non-Anglo-Saxon nations, into an organization without any real binding ties diplomatically, militarily, or economically.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the insistence of Indian Muslims, led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, on a separate Muslim state, and the outbreak of religious violence following the independence of India and Pakistan, disillusioned not only Gandhi and Mountbatten, but many who believed in the process of decolonization. The most important effect of granting independence to India, however, was its impact upon the rest of the Empire. "The haphazard spread of Britain's colonial possessions concealed an inner logic."<sup>17</sup> That inner logic was the defense of India. Virtually every British possession except those in North America and the West Indies were acquired for that purpose. With India no longer the centerpiece of Empire, the remainder of the colonies now came to be justified in their own right."<sup>18</sup>



Winston Churchill and the Tories returned to power in 1951 determined to maintain those colonies. The futility of such a goal was ignored. "The end of the Raj in India made the end of Empire certain."<sup>19</sup> British efforts to avoid that certainty came to dominate British global policy.

In addition to internal pressures for decolonization, and nationalist movements in the colonies, Britain was also under great pressure to end its Empire from the superpowers, particularly the United States. "The United States was identified as a major enemy of British imperial interests, possibly even more dangerous than the Soviet Union because it was nominally a friend and ally."<sup>20</sup> Despite America's Anglophilism, it was also anti-imperialist. Furthermore, the United States was the shining example to colonial peoples in the postwar world.<sup>21</sup> Britain's dependence upon the United States strategically made it more vulnerable to American pressure. The British, however, were fairly successful in dealing with this pressure without damage to the "special relationship" until Suez. As for the Soviet Union, although there existed total antipathy between the United Kingdom and the USSR, the Soviets overestimated the strength of the British Empire and did little to undermine it. Super power pressure in the decade following the war, particularly from Britain's American ally, provided some added impetus to the decolonization process, but not decisively until Suez.



Despite the retreat from India and Palestine, Britain exercised its global power in the decade following the Second World War as an imperial power as well as a member of the Western alliance. Britain was a leading founder of SEATO and CENTO, and used armed force in combatting the Communist revolt in Malaya, the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, and made a large contribution to the UN forces in Korea. These successful military operations concealed for many how dependent even British global military power was on American cooperation. But the events of October and November 1956 shattered that image of Britain as an independent global actor.

The Suez Crisis of 1956 proved a watershed for British global policy. For British policy-makers Nasser's seizure of the Suez Canal struck a special chord because of memories of the desert campaigns of World War Two.<sup>22</sup> When attempts at international mediation failed, the Eden Government, in collusion with the French and Israelis, selected a military option. Without warning Washington, Israel struck in the Sinai while British and French airborne troops seized the canal. International outrage at the act was overwhelming. President Eisenhower refused to support his two allies and demanded a withdrawal, while Khrushchev threatened to "rain rockets on London and Paris." The British and French were forced to withdraw in ignominy. Eden resigned shortly thereafter due to "ill health." Britain's last great imperial hurrah ended in failure.



The impact of that failure dramatically altered Britain's global position. The reality of Britain's weakness and dependence on the United States was vividly demonstrated. As one obituary for Anthony Eden noted, "He was the last Prime Minister to believe Britain was a great power and the first to confront a crisis that proved she was not."<sup>23</sup> After Suez, the Anglo-American alliance became less and less a partnership and more the protection of a small state by a large one. Nasser's apparent victory over the British ended any hope of maintaining an imperial position in Africa.<sup>24</sup> Even at home Suez had become a symbol of Empire, and its loss broke the will to hold on to that Empire. Furthermore, the crisis exposed the weakness of the Commonwealth, as only Australia and New Zealand supported the British move. Anglophobia among the Arabs, who had traditionally considered Britain as a protector, was greatly fueled. By the end of 1956 Britain found itself in a much more hostile world with a substantially weaker perception of its power and a tarnished image. "On the whole, the British bowed out of Empire gracefully. Suez was the particular occasion on which they did so ungracefully."<sup>25</sup> With Suez the sun finally began to set on the British Empire.

In the decade following Suez, the dismantling of Empire was accomplished with remarkable speed. British power gave way to national movements, even in colonies where the ability to conduct "responsible, democratic self-government" was questionable at best. Ghana received independence in 1957,





followed by Cyprus in 1959. In 1960 Nigeria, in 1961 Sierra Leone and Tanganyika, and in 1962 Uganda all became independent. By 1967 Britain was out of Africa, with Kenya, Zanzibar in 1963, Malawi and Zambia in 1964, Gambia in 1965, and Botswana and Lesotho in 1966 receiving their independence. The white settlers in Rhodesia in 1965 unilaterally declared their independence from Britain, to which Britain only responded with economic sanctions. South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1961 further weakened British influence in Africa. At the same time, British colonial power and influence in the Arabian peninsula was also ended. The 1967 withdrawal from Aden and the 1971 granting of independence to the United Arab Emirates ended Britain's traditional role in the Persian Gulf. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, even colonies thought too small for independence, such as Malta, Anguilla, Bermuda, and Mauritius also became independent. The British Empire became history.

Despite Suez and the subsequent flood of decolonizations, Great Britain entered the 1960's determined to remain a power with significant global interests. Though the 1957 Defence White Paper had placed heavy emphasis on nuclear weapons over conventional forces and some retrenchment took place in the British defense establishment, Britain still possessed a considerable navy and other power projection forces. Both Harold MacMillan and his successor Harold Wilson attempted to maintain British power east of Suez. Emphasis was placed on



mobile forces centered around Britain's aging carrier fleet, and those forces intervened in several Asian and African crises, most notably in Kuwait in 1961, which prevented an attack by Iraq,<sup>26</sup> Malaysia in 1963-66, and Kenya in 1964. However, the financial crisis of 1966 ended Britain's global ambitions. A new aircraft carrier program to replace Britain's aging fleet was cancelled, and forces in the Indian Ocean and in Malaya were greatly reduced. Britain needed severe financial retrenchment and its global position became expendable. The historic Defence White Paper of 1968 finally ended Britain's role "East of Suez." By 1971 Britain's permanent military presence east of Suez consisted only of the small garrison in Hong Kong and a few administrative personnel in Singapore and some assorted islands. Britain's global power had ended.

Since 1971 Britain's global interests have been largely limited to trade, its few remaining colonies, and its ostensible leader of the Commonwealth, a role which provides little real influence. However, two events at the end of the 1970's and the beginning of the 1980's pushed Britain back onto the world's center stage. The first was the resolution of the Rhodesian crisis in 1979. By force of personality, British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington forced a solution to the Rhodesian civil war which at one time gave the world the spectacle of a black African parliament voting itself out of existence to be replaced by a white colonial



government. There, British troops were involved in insuring a free election. Though Britain withdrew after the settlement, it proved itself still able to act in Africa. The second crisis occurred when Argentina seized the Falklands in 1982. Britain responded by retaking the islands with an outstanding example of power projection and a short victorious war. Even after its global retreat, Britain could still make itself felt around the world.

Despite these last two episodes the prospects of Britain again becoming a significant global power are very dim. The Rhodesian affair was more a residue from the end of Empire than a new interest in imperial goals. Although the British government currently is expressing its determination to hold the Falklands, protecting those small islands and maintaining small garrisons in Hong Kong, Cyprus, Belize, and Gibraltar will certainly stretch Britain's diminished resources. Indeed, Britain's financial weakness has made global power a luxury it can no longer afford. "Reinstatement of the former British presence 'East of Suez' ... is no longer either a political or an economic possibility... resource constraints and our primary responsibility to NATO rule out any idea of creating a substantial standing 'intervention force'."<sup>27</sup> Although Britain still has the power to intervene in special circumstances such as the Falklands, Britain's era as a global actor of any significance has ended.



British foreign policy since 1945 has been shaped by changes in the international system. The development of nuclear weapons, the dramatic alteration of the European system, and the end of European empires have determined that policy. Furthermore, Britain's efforts to adjust to these changes have been greatly affected by its economic decline. "The history of British defense policy is of an attempt to reconcile the mismatch between resources and commitments."<sup>28</sup> This explains not only the end of the global role, but the nature and extent of nuclear weapons policy and the European commitment. As financial problems continue, so will the strictures on British security policy.

The cornerstone of British foreign policy since 1941 has been its "special relationship" with the United States. This relationship has survived the widening gulf between the two powers since World War Two, and has affected British nuclear, European and global policy. British nuclear weapons have given it special status among America's allies, and technical cooperation has been one of the strongest bonds of the relation. Britain's NATO role has achieved the major accomplishment of tying the United States to Britain's defense. Britain's global role, which conflicted with American policy at least during the first two decades after the war, has been sacrificed to economy. British foreign policy has and will continue to reflect the priority placed on the "special relationship."





As Britain looks to the future, it faces certain dilemmas in all three policy areas. The need to replace the aging POLARIS force at a time of financial difficulties and an anti-nuclear revival has again brought Britain's deterrent to the center of policy debates. Those same financial strigencies and the growing divergence between the United States and Western Europe are causing a reappraisal of Britain's European role. Finally, although Empire is no longer an issue, some lingering problems such as the Falklands and the future of Hong Kong must also be addressed by British policy makers. Presently, Britain remains committed to both nuclear forces and to NATO involvement and its willingness to project its power beyond Europe if necessary. The framework Britain uses to resolve these problems will provide the basis for future British policy.



## FOOTNOTES

1. Bernard D. Nossiter, Britain: A Future That Works (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1978), p. 3.
2. Ernest R. Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, The Encyclopedia of Military History: from 3500 B.C. to the Present (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 990.
3. Colin Cross, The Fall of the British Empire 1918-1968 (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1968), p. 248.
4. Acheson cited in Robert Conquest, Present Danger: Towards a Foreign Policy (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1979), p. 3.
5. Robin Ranger, "Understanding British Strategic Thinking: The Act of Muddling (and Mumbling) Through," paper presented at the International Studies Association Conference, March, 1981, p. 23.
6. Arthur Cyr, British Foreign Policy and the Atlantic Area: The Techniques of Accommodation (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1979), p. 65.
7. Ministry of Defence, The United Kingdom Trident Programme (London: Ministry of Defence Open Government Document 8211, March 1982), Introduction.
8. For a thorough discussion of alternatives and their relative merits, read Ministry of Defence, The United Kingdom Trident Programme.
9. Leon D. Epstein, "British Foreign Policy," Foreign Policy in World Politics, ed. Roy C. Macridis (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 67.
10. Ibid., p. 70.
11. Lawrence W. Martin, "The Domestic Content of British Defense Policy," The Internal Fabric of Western Security, Ed. Gregory Flynn (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 167.
12. Lawrence Freedman, "British Defence Policy After the Falklands," World Today (September 1982), p. 333.
13. Conquest, p. 87.



14. James Morris, Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), pp. 495-496.
15. Cross, p. 322.
16. Epstein, p. 55-56.
17. Edward Grierson, The Death of the Imperial Dream: The British Commonwealth and Empire 1775-1969 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1972), p. 273.
18. Phillip Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez 1947-1968 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. xiii.
19. Morris, p. 495.
20. David Goldsworthy, Colonial Issues in British Politics 1945-1961 (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 288.
21. Morris, p. 466.
22. Grierson, p. 302.
23. Richard Rose, "British Government: The Job at the Top," Presidents and Prime Ministers, ed. Richard Rose and Ezra N. Suleiman (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1980), p. 38.
24. Grierson, p. 314.
25. Cross, p. 324.
26. J. L. Moulton, Defence in a Changing World (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), p. 108.
27. Statements on the Defence Estimates 1981, quoted in Freedman, p. 332.
28. Freedman, p. 331.



### III. THE ROYAL NAVY AND THE BRITISH NUCLEAR DETERRENT

The first major arena of power which involves the Royal Navy is that of the nuclear balance of power. The Royal Navy today has exclusive responsibility for the British strategic nuclear deterrent. This responsibility was once the domain of the Royal Air Force and its VULCAN, VICTOR, and VALIANT bombers, but after the SKYBOLT affair and the Nassau Conference, the role began shifting from the RAF to the Navy. By the early 1980s, the strategic nuclear strike role of the VULCAN bombers with their BLUE STEEL nuclear stand-off missiles had been phased out. The Royal Navy had become sole operator of Britain's strategic forces.

The strategic deterrent role has become a primary function of the Navy. As the fleet's other capabilities continue to decline, the nuclear forces have taken on increasing importance. "The operation of the strategic force will remain the Royal Navy's first and most vital task for Britain's security."<sup>1</sup>

The instrument of the Navy's nuclear deterrent has been, and will continue to be, the nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN). This type of force gives Britain's a survivable second strike capability which is considered necessary to maintain an effective deterrent. Britain's decision to replace the POLARIS force with TRIDENT reflects the favorable attitude of British policymakers toward the SSBN. The Royal





Navy's POLARIS submarines have provided Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent since the late sixties, and TRIDENT SLBMs will provide such a deterrent into the next century.

#### A. POLARIS

Britain has been involved with POLARIS since the Nassau Conference of 1962. Prime Minister Harold MacMillan and his advisors came to Nassau feeling betrayed and distressed by the Kennedy-MacNamara decision to cancel SKYBOLT. Kennedy successfully solved the British dilemma by offering to sell them the American POLARIS submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) and technical assistance on submarine construction. The British accepted the offer, and the Royal Navy gained the role of operating Britain's strategic deterrent.

The terms of the agreement allowed Britain to take full advantage of American research and development for a sea-based deterrent. Under the agreement Britain would buy 100 POLARIS A3 missiles from the United States, and the Americans would provide extensive technical assistance in SSBN design and construction, and weapons system fire control. Britain would build the submarines and design and build the nuclear warheads for the missiles. This arrangement permitted Britain to build an effective SSBN force at far less cost than if Britain had designed and built everything itself.

One of the major issues concerning the program was the number of submarines to be built. Recognizing the need to



overhaul, repair, and refit the boats from time to time, and the vulnerability of submarines in port, Britain's leaders faced the requirement to have a portion of the force on deterrent patrol at all times. If the force contained only three boats, there would be periods when no boats were on station. If a four-boat force was built, at least one would always be on station, and a five-boat force would permit Britain to keep two boats on station at all times.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, the British programme originally involved building five submarines, but in 1965, the Wilson Government cancelled the fifth boat as an economy measure. This left the deterrent with no margin against accidental loss of a boat. Fortunately, Britain has successfully avoided such an occurrence. "Since 1969 there has never been a moment when our Polaris force did not have at least one submarine on patrol, effectively invulnerable to preemptive attack and at high readiness to launch its missiles if required."<sup>3</sup> The four boat number has met Britain's needs.

Since the first SSBN entered service in 1967, the British POLARIS force has been very successful in service. The force consists of four submarines, RESOLUTION, RENOWN, REPULSE, and REVENGE, each displacing 8,400 tons submerged, and armed with sixteen POLARIS A3 missiles as well as torpedo tubes.<sup>4</sup> Through careful material management, no major accidents or equipment failures have occurred. Furthermore, operating costs have been kept down to approximately 100 million pounds per year



in 1976 prices.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, however, the performance of POLARIS is best measured by the fact that it has performed its sole mission, deterrence against nuclear attack, successfully since it entered service.

Since the late 1970s, the POLARIS force has undergone a major improvement program. This program, called CHEVALINE, involves improving the penetration ability of warhead against an ABM defense. Before CHEVALINE, each POLARIS missile mounted a multiple re-entry vehicle (MRV) of three 200 kiloton (TNT equivalent) warheads. Although little is publicly known about CHEVALINE, it has a MRV capable with "...hardened, maneuvering, and early separating re-entry vehicles with advanced decoys as penetration aids."<sup>6</sup> The cost of this program exceeded a billion pounds, but it extended the effectiveness of POLARIS into the next decade. However, even CHEVALINE is only a short-term improvement and does not address the long-term future of Britain's nuclear deterrent.

#### B. THE NEED FOR A REPLACEMENT

No weapon system, however successful, can be expected to perform its mission forever, and POLARIS is no exception. Age of equipment, service wear and tear, and technological progress combine to shorten the effective life-span of the POLARIS force. Furthermore, the end of the U.S. Navy's POLARIS fleet has drastically reduced the economy of scale for replacement parts and modifications which the British have until recently



enjoyed. Several factors are working to make the replacement of POLARIS necessary.

The first factor which works to limit the POLARIS force's future is the age of equipment. The four submarines, all of which entered service between 1967 and 1969, have a service life of twenty to twenty-five years, with thirty years possible with proper maintenance.<sup>7</sup> Both the hulls and the machinery show wear as they remain in operation. Age also affects the missile components, particularly rocket fuel. Although schemes such as freezing fuel in storage have been considered, with Britain as the only user of POLARIS, the cost of maintaining fuel supplies for the missiles will rise as time goes on. By the early 1990s, age of equipment and components will be a major problem for the POLARIS force.

In addition to age, the advance of technology also threatens the POLARIS force's future. Advancements in ASW technology and capabilities have increased the vulnerability of the British SSBNs, which do not have the advantage of a decade's improvement in submarine silencing. Recent Soviet developments in air defense weapons and renewed interest in ballistic missile defense have promoted growing doubts about even a CHEVALINE-modified POLARIS weapon succeeding in striking its target. "All the available evidence converges, therefore, to suggest that, by some time in the early 1990's, both Britain's submarines and their missiles will reach the end of the road."<sup>8</sup>





In addition to age and obsolescence, the British are also confronted with the prospect of sharply increasing costs for operating the POLARIS force. This is a result of the phasing out of POLARIS in the United States Navy. Although the United States is obligated by the Nassau Agreement to provide support for the British POLARIS force as long as it remains in service, the cost of maintaining production capability for spare parts will fall solely on Britain. The availability of out-of-service U.S. equipment and spares may help for a short period of time, but offers no long-term parts support. Furthermore, any further modernization of the POLARIS system would require Britain to fund all the research and development costs. Maintaining the POLARIS force beyond the next decade is both economically and militarily unfeasible.

#### C. THE CRUISE MISSILE ALTERNATIVE

When a British Government began searching for a replacement for POLARIS in the late 1970s, one particularly attractive alternative was the cruise missile. Land, air, or surface ship-based weapons of any kind were dismissed as being too vulnerable to preemptive strike, but the idea of submarine-launched cruise missiles merited serious consideration. The cruise missile was ultimately turned down, but only after considerable debate.

The cruise missile alternative generated a considerable amount of support. That Britain's chief ally, the United



States, had embarked on a massive cruise missile program enhanced the credibility of such a system. Furthermore, the cruise missile seemed to offer several real advantages. First, the unit cost of a cruise missile is far less than that of a ballistic missile. Second, the cruise missile offers potentially greater accuracy than the ballistic missile. Finally, the cruise missile is relatively small and easy to store. These advantages provided the justification for supporting the cruise missile alternative.

Opposition to the cruise missile, however, was able to counter those arguments and make a strong case against the cruise missile alternative. First, a cruise missile can be intercepted more readily than a ballistic missile; a larger force of cruise missiles is therefore required to ensure penetration of Soviet defences. "With the possibility of a British cruise missile force in mind, it would be true to say that Soviet defences erected against the expectation of a massive American attack of some thousands of missiles could effect a much higher rate of attrition against a smaller force."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, cruise missiles only have a single warhead, which means a larger force is necessary to achieve sufficient striking power. Third, cruise missiles are shorter ranged than ballistic missiles, which gives the submarine less searoom in which to operate. Fourth, the use of torpedo tubes to fire the missiles would result in a slower rate of fire and therefore greater vulnerability to ASW or counter-battery



fire during the firing sequence.<sup>10</sup> Finally, to achieve a sufficient force level would require more submarines than a ballistic missile force and submarines are the most expensive component. Consideration was given to placing cruise missiles on a nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSN), but their mission is completely incompatible with strategic nuclear strike. As a result of these factors, the cruise missile alternative was rejected.

#### D. TRIDENT

On July 15, 1980 the British Government announced its intention to purchase the American TRIDENT missile as Britain's future deterrent. The new arrangement, by which Britain would buy the American weapon, was remarkably similar to the Nassau Agreement eighteen years earlier. The United States would provide the missiles, fire control equipment, and technical assistance, while Britain would build the submarines and nuclear warheads itself. The decision to buy TRIDENT, however, came about only after consideration of several SLBM alternatives, arguments for TRIDENT, and questions on the size of the program.

Before the decision to purchase TRIDENT was made, some consideration was given to other SLBM alternatives. A solely British missile, or an Anglo-French missile, was dismissed as being too costly to develop, and lacking in the technological sophistication of American weapons. Many advocated continuing



with the POLARIS missile in new hulls, but the arguments of age, obsolescence against an ABM defense, and lack of commonality with the U.S. Navy, defeated that alternative. Consideration was given to the American POSEIDON missile, but most of the arguments against POLARIS apply to it as well, and the costs would be as high as TRIDENT.<sup>11</sup> Only TRIDENT offered Britain an advanced system in which the Royal Navy could share material and technical support with the U.S. Navy into the the next century.

TRIDENT offers Britain several advantages as a nuclear deterrent. First, it is a new, modern system, offering greater reliability in service as well as commonality of material with the American SSBN force. "Trident components will be more reliable and have a longer life than those for POLARIS, allowing missiles to remain in their tubes throughout their planned 7-8 year period between major submarine refits, with such periodic servicing as is necessary carried out in the submarines themselves by British personnel."<sup>12</sup> Secondly, TRIDENT offers far greater striking power than the alternatives, a very important point when present and future Soviet ABM defenses are considered. Third, the greater range of TRIDENT allows the submarine greater sea-room and therefore greater survivability. These factors make TRIDENT the best choice for Britain's future.

Initially Britain chose the TRIDENT I C-4 missile for its future deterrent. Although the United States was developing





the TRIDENT II D-5 missile, no decision on production was expected until the mid-1980s. The Reagan Administration, however, decided to accelerate the D-5 production schedule. This offered Britain a choice between the C-4 and D-5 versions and in March 1982 the British Government chose the TRIDENT II D-5. Although this larger, more capable missile would cost 390 million pounds more (in September, 1980 prices) it would be more economical over the lifetime of the system, as the United States would phase out the C-4 by the late 1990s, and commonality with the Americans would be lost if Britain stayed with the C-4.<sup>13</sup> Britain's future missile will be the TRIDENT II D-5.

Although the decision over which missile to buy was paramount, some discussion has also centered around the design of the missile-carrying submarine. Some consideration was given to an inexpensive diesel-powered coastal submarine, but the requirement to snorkel, lack of range, lack of commonality with the Americans, vulnerability to mining and the costs in manpower and money that a larger force would require, ruled out the non-nuclear-powered option.<sup>14</sup> Instead the new submarines will be fitted with PWR-2 type reactors, the newest design in the Royal Navy. Questions also arose over the number of missile tubes, with choice of twelve or sixteen being the most popular. Although twelve-tube boats would save 80 million pounds over the sixteen-tube option, it would reduce striking power by one-fourth.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, sixteen



tubes give added flexibility should Soviet ABM defenses improve. The future British TRIDENT submarine will be a nuclear-powered boat with sixteen tubes capable of carrying TRIDENT II D-5 missiles.

The final issue concerning TRIDENT has been that of the number of boats to be built. The dilemma is the same as that of the POLARIS program. "Four is the minimum needed to sustain without fail at least one always on patrol."<sup>16</sup> A fifth boat would double the minimum number on patrol, and cost a smaller percentage of the program than the first four boats, but would still remain very expensive. The Thatcher Government has therefore elected to order four new submarines, with an option to order a fifth. Given Britain's economic constraints and its success with the four-boat POLARIS force, however, the eventual building of a fifth TRIDENT submarine remains very unlikely. In structure the TRIDENT force will resemble the POLARIS force it supercedes.

The Royal Navy has been charged with the responsibility for Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent since 1969, and will continue to hold that responsibility into the future. The POLARIS force has provided Britain with a secure second-strike capability which has served as a successful deterrent to attack on Great Britain. The TRIDENT program will continue to provide that capability for Britain into the next century. Britain remains determined to be a nuclear power, and the embodiment of the power will continue to be the Royal Navy's nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines.



## FOOTNOTES

1. Ministry of Defence, The United Kingdom Defence Programme: The Way Forward, Cmnd 8288 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, June 1981), p. 5.
2. Ian Smart, "British Foreign Policy to 1985: I: Beyond Polaris," International Affairs, vol. 53 (October 1977), p. 558.
3. Ministry of Defence The Future United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Force. (London: Ministry of Defence Open Government Document 80123, July 1980), p. 13.
4. John Moore, ed., Jane's Fighting Ships 1983-84. (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1983), p. 581.
5. Ian Smart, "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: Technical, Economic, and Strategic Issues," British Foreign Policy to 1985. (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1977), p- 11.
6. David S. Yost, "Ballistic Missile Defense and the Atlantic Alliance," International Security, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Fall 1982), pp. 149-150.
7. Peter Nailor, "The Strategic Context", The Future of Britain's Deterrent Force, Adelphi Papers, 156 (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1980), p. 16.
8. Smart, "Beyond Polaris", p. 560.
9. Jonathan Alford, "The Range of Choice", The Future of Britain's Deterrent Force, Adelphi Papers, 156 (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1980), p. 20.
10. Ministry of Defence, The Future Deterrent Force, p. 15.
11. Ibid., p. 19.
12. Ministry of Defence, Statement on the Defence Estimates 1983. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1983), p. 7.
13. Ministry of Defence, Statement on the Defence Estimates 1982. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1982), pp. 4-5.



14. Ministry of Defence, The Future Deterrent Force, p. 13.
15. Ministry of Defence, Defence Estimates 1982, p. 5.
16. Ministry of Defence, The Future Deterrent Force, p. 21.





#### IV. THE ROYAL NAVY AND GREAT BRITAIN'S EUROPEAN COMMITMENT

The second great arena of power which involves the Royal Navy is that of Europe. The primary role of the Royal Navy's conventional forces today is directly related to Britain's commitment to NATO and collective security in Europe. With the retreat from East of Suez, the Navy has evolved from being a global navy to being a European navy. All British naval procurement since the mid-1960's, except for the POLARIS force, has been to meet the requirements of a Europe-centered naval role. That change has been accepted by most British policy-makers, and today debates and discussions on the Royal Navy's missions, tasks and future center on this role.

The Navy's role in European security is shaped by several factors. As an island nation, Britain has a long and great maritime tradition. The Royal Navy is faced with a considerable maritime threat from the Soviet Northern and Baltic Fleets. However, in contrast to these factors in favor of a larger fleet, other factors serve to limit Britain's naval efforts. Britain's economic decline has placed severe constraints on the resources available for the military. Within these limits the Navy must compete with the Army and Air Force presence in the Federal Republic of Germany. NATO's basic concept of the major Soviet threat being a ground and air threat in Central Europe has given the British Army of



the Rhine and RAF Germany a primacy of purpose which the Navy has found difficult to match. This tendency is enhanced by the British Government's political goals and commitments toward its European allies, which include greater integration into the West European system. As a result, the importance of the Royal Navy's primary missions has come under doubt, and perhaps worse, a sea-oriented strategy may have become politically incompatible with British foreign policy. Nevertheless, the Royal Navy plays a major role in Britain's European defense effort, and will continue to play such a role in the future.

#### A. THE ROYAL NAVY'S HISTORICAL ROLE TOWARD EUROPE

For over four centuries, the Royal Navy has been the great shield protecting the British Isles from Europe's wars. It has defended against invasion threats, protected British commerce and communications, and has made Britain's will felt by its continental foes. In accomplishing these tasks, the Royal Navy has employed various concepts and aspects of naval power.

The most important of the Navy's historical roles has been that of sea-control around the British Isles. That those islands have not undergone a foreign invasion for over 900 years testifies to the effectiveness with which that role has been carried out. In 1588, a massive invasion fleet sent by Phillip II of Spain was defeated and driven off in a great running battle up the English Channel and East Coast of



England. In 1805 Napoleon marched the Grand Army to Calais in preparation to invade England, but attempts to gain even temporary control of the Channel failed, and ultimately led to decisive defeat at Trafalgar. In 1940, Hitler was forced to abandon Operation Seelowe (Sealion), the invasion of England, when the Luftwaffe failed to achieve air control or sea control over the Channel. Although this battle was fought primarily by the RAF, it was the Royal Navy's superiority over the German Navy that made German air control a must in order to even attempt an invasion. In addition to these three episodes, the Navy has acted as an effective deterrent preventing foes from even considering invasion throughout numerous wars and crises over the past four centuries. Control of the "Narrow Sea" has been the first and foremost of the Royal Navy's missions.

A second great historical role of the Royal Navy has been protection of the sea lines of communication. For an island nation lacking in many national resources and with a large overseas empire, maintaining those lines of communication is vital. This dependence on overseas commerce has grown over time, as Britain's population has out-stripped British agriculture's ability to feed it, and the pace of technology has demanded ever more resources. This vulnerability has led many of Britain's enemies to employ a strategy of guerre de course, or war on commerce, against the British. The French have employed it throughout their wars with Britain, the



Americans employed it in the American Revolution and War of 1812, and Germany has twice in this century brought Britain near defeat by submarine war against British seaborne communications.

In order to counter this strategy and protect those communications, the British have adopted several methods to ensure a satisfactory degree of sea control. One method has been to limit the enemy's access to the open sea, through blockade or control of straits. (The North Sea mine barrage of 1918, whereby British laid a minefield across the North Sea from Scotland to near Norway, is one example of this technique.) A second method has involved sending "hunting" forces out to track down and destroy enemy commerce raiders. Ultimately, however, the most successful technique has been to convoy shipping. Although convoying has occasionally been dismissed at the beginning of some conflicts as obsolete, the British have reverted to it whenever other methods alone have failed. Britain's geographic situation has made protection of sea communications almost as vital as defense against invasion.

The third major naval role which Britain has historically performed in Europe has been that of power projection ashore. This too has taken several forms. The most effective way in which British seapower has been felt on the continent has been through the instrument of blockade. Whether through close blockade, as during the wars against France, or distant





blockade, as in the First World War, Britain has repeatedly proved capable of bringing economic ruin upon European opponents. It was the British blockade that brought defeat to Holland in the Seventeenth Century. It was the British blockade that wrecked Napoleon's Continental System, and helped to bring about the disastrous invasion of Russia. And, it was the British blockade that helped to provoke revolution and collapse in Germany in the fall of 1918.

The other aspect of power projection has been the landing of British troops on the continent. Wellington's campaigns in Iberia and the Low Countries were made possible by seapower, as was the Crimean Campaign and, of course, the invasions of Sicily, Italy and France during the Second World War. Through power projection, the Royal Navy has played a decisive role in British policy toward Europe.

Since 1945 the Royal Navy's approach to these historic roles has changed dramatically. As a result of Britain's naval decline vis a vis the United States and the Soviet Union and the development of nuclear weapons, both the relevance of these roles and their practicality have been called into question. However, despite some change in terminology and technique, the present roles and missions of the Royal Navy in Europe are a continuance of these historic roles.



## B. THE NAVAL THREAT

Today the Royal Navy faces a naval threat which, in capability and power relative to the British fleet alone, is by far the greatest in Britain's history. Since the late 1950s, when it surpassed the Royal Navy in overall strength, the Soviet Navy has grown into the world's largest navy, matching the shrunken Royal Navy many times over. In the air, on the surface, and under the sea, the Soviets pose a severe challenge for the British.

The Soviet Long-Range Naval Air Force poses a major threat for British surface units north of Scotland. Operating from bases on the Kola Peninsula, BACKFIRE, BLINDER, BADGER, and BEAR bombers carrying AS-2, AS-3, AS-4, AS-5 and AS-6 air-to-surface stand-off missiles constitute a threat which the Royal Navy would find impossible to stop. These missiles would likely prove difficult for shipboard weapons to intercept and a fleet-carrier-less Royal Navy would be hard pressed to engage the aircraft themselves. In addition to the land-based bombers, the Soviet Navy has begun to move into sea-based aviation as well. The KIEV-class ships have given the Soviets a VSTOL capability similar to that of the British INVINCIBLE class, while the Soviets now have a full-deck aircraft carrier under construction. Any British naval effort must take into consideration the Soviet Union's considerable air strike capability.

The Soviet surface fleet also composes a major threat to the Royal Navy. This fleet has grown from a primarily coastal



force in the 1950s into a large fully-capable ocean-going fleet. The Soviets have achieved superiority over Britain both in numbers and size of units. Large, powerful ships such as the battlecruiser KIROV, the KIEV class carriers, and KRASINA, KARA, and KRESTA cruisers have no match in the British fleet. Furthermore, the Soviet major surface combatants outnumber British units by four-to-one.<sup>1</sup> The Soviet surface fleet possesses an extensive air defence, anti-submarine, and anti-ship cruise missile capability. Although this Soviet surface fleet is by no means invulnerable, it does pose a major challenge to the Royal Navy and its allies.

Since the Second World War, the Soviet Union has maintained the world's largest submarine force. This force, many times larger than the German U-boat fleet that nearly defeated Britain in 1940, is equipped with nuclear-powered as well as diesel-powered submarines, and many of these boats are armed with anti-shipping cruise missiles. The new ALFA-class submarines have demonstrated underwater performance abilities far greater than any other submarine in the world. Although the Royal Navy is configured to a large degree for ASW operations, its ability is far overmatched by the size of the Soviet subsurface threat.

Although on paper the Soviet Navy far out-numbers the Royal Navy, the Soviets have many other commitments beyond the North Atlantic, and their forces are discussed around the world. Two Soviet fleets, the Pacific and the Black Sea, as



well as the Mediterranean Squadron, pose only indirect threats to Britain. The other two, the Baltic Fleet and the Northern Fleet, however, do pose a direct threat. The Baltic Fleet is the nearest threat to the British Isles, and one which the Royal Navy would likely face without much support from the United States Navy. However, the Baltic Fleet is the smallest of the four Soviet fleets, and its equipment is rather old. Furthermore, the narrow waters it would need to transit in order to reach the North Sea and its close proximity to NATO land-based air forces limit its ability to threaten Britain. The Northern Fleet, however, is a different matter. The largest and most modern of the four fleets, it can strike directly against the British Isles and the North Atlantic sea lanes from its bases on the Kola Peninsula. It is on this threat axis that any future naval war for Britain will be fought and decided.

#### C. THE ROYAL NAVY'S PRESENT ROLE IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC

The principal role of the Royal Navy in a conventional war in Central Europe would be to secure the sea-lines-of-communication in the Eastern Atlantic and the English Channel.<sup>2</sup> This role involves not only the protection of maritime communication itself, but of the British Isles as an eastern terminus of trans-Atlantic communications. British naval leaders accepted this role in the years following World War Two, when memories of the Battle of the Atlantic were still fresh. When Britain surrendered its global role, the Atlantic





requirement provided the Royal Navy some insulation from the full effects of the post-Empire cutbacks.<sup>3</sup> However, increasing financial pressure has combined today with the many doubts as to the validity of such a role in either a short war or a nuclear scenario to threaten even the continuance of that role for the Navy. Yet the British Government remains committed, though with reduced means, toward maintaining the principal role of protecting sea communications.

The first aspect of performing this role involves protection of the United Kingdom base itself. The Navy's part in this mission is centered around anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and mine warfare in British waters, particularly around ports, and in the Channel. For its local anti-submarine forces, Britain will rely principally on maritime patrol aircraft and its conventional submarines, although surface units and nuclear submarines could be diverted to deal with a threat so close to the homeland. The vulnerability of British ports to offensive mining has caused some alarm, and Britain has responded with the new HUNT-class mine-countermeasures (MCM) vessels.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, STANAVFORCHAN, a combined force of MCM units from several navies, but under British control, provides additional forces in the English Channel.<sup>5</sup> Although Britain's naval effort in its own waters is not calculated to counter a massive naval attack, it is designed to meet a subsurface/mine threat which could develop in a conventional war.



With reasonable security of British waters achieved, the most important mission of the Royal Navy becomes that of protection of the transatlantic sea lanes. Under present NATO planning, massive quantities of troops and supplies would be moved from North America to Europe, without which NATO would be very hard-pressed to survive. Most of this would come by ship. "The reinforcement and resupply of forces in Europe is completely dependent on the sea lanes across the Atlantic Ocean being kept open."<sup>6</sup> Protection of the sea lanes serves not only a wartime role but a peacetime deterrent role as well. By emphasizing such a role, the Royal Navy makes the reinforcement of American troops in Europe more feasible.<sup>7</sup> This role, of course, does not fall on the Royal Navy alone, but is shared with the United States Navy and the navies of the European allies. While the Americans provide almost all the forces for the western and central Atlantic, the Royal Navy provides at least 90% of NATO's available forces in the Eastern Atlantic.<sup>8</sup> Fulfilling this mission demands the preponderance of British conventional forces.

British perceptions of the nature of the threat to sea communications have shaped the conventional forces of the Royal Navy. The experiences of two world wars and the Soviets' limit ability to project air or surface power into the Central Atlantic have made the perceived major threat to be subsurface. "The orthodox view, particularly in Britain, has been that



the main naval task will be to protect the seaborne reinforcement and resupply of the Central Front against Soviet submarine attack."<sup>9</sup> To meet this threat the Royal Navy has become principally an ASW force. "ASW is the major pre-occupation of the modern Royal Navy."<sup>10</sup>

The ASW mission can be accomplished by performing three tasks. These would involve attacking Soviet submarines as they leave their bases, intercepting them as they run the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap, and finding and destroying those that enter the Central Atlantic.<sup>11</sup> The first task is the exclusive domain of the nuclear-powered attack submarine, and although British submarines may participate, their lack of numbers would leave that role largely to the American submarines. The other two tasks, however, would involve considerable British forces.

The battle of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom Gap would be of key importance in deciding the next war for the Atlantic and the Royal Navy would play a major part in that battle. "In these areas its role would be to prevent Soviet maritime forces, whether air, surface, or sub-surface, from entering the re-supply convoy routes."<sup>12</sup> To accomplish this, the Navy has placed the heaviest emphasis on submarines and maritime patrol aircraft.

This results from several factors. First, submarines are considered by many to be the best ASW platform, as they operate in the same medium as their prey. Furthermore, the nature of



the barrier is such that submarines can operate well below cavitation speed (and therefore much more quietly) and still intercept submarines passing through the area. Secondly, most of the GIUK Gap is well within range of the RAF maritime patrol aircraft and strike aircraft, should a surface threat appear. Finally, surface ships have been given a less important role as a result of continuing doubts about their survivability against cruise missiles and aircraft. These doubts were further fueled by the Falklands War. "Indeed in one respect the fundamental premise that surface ships were becoming distressingly vulnerable was supported all too dramatically by the evidence provided by Exocet and some very unsophisticated free-fall bombs, many of which failed to detonate."<sup>13</sup> As a result submarines and ASW aircraft are considered the best weapons for fighting the GIUK Gap battle.<sup>14</sup>

This attitude has been reflected in all British Defence Estimates since The Way Forward in 1981. While force levels for surface ships have been reduced, the nuclear-powered attack submarine program has continued, and some increases have been made in maritime patrol aircraft force levels. A substantial portion of these forces will be committed to the vital GIUK Gap barrier. Although British forces by themselves would be ineffective in covering this area, together with American forces, such an effort could greatly reduce the number of Soviet submarines penetrating to the Central Atlantic.





Even a massive barrier effort is not guaranteed to stop all Soviet submarine penetration, nor does it deal with submarines already in the Central Atlantic at the beginning of hostilities. How to deal with this problem is still an issue for debate. Computer analysis supports the concept of protected sea lanes patrolled by hunting groups.<sup>15</sup> The INVINCIBLE-class aircraft carriers would conceivably form the nucleus of such a group. However, historical precedent indicates that the convoy is more effective, and prudence indicates that the Western navies must be prepared for either task.<sup>16</sup> Fortunately, the force requirement for both tasks are similar.

In any action in the mid-Atlantic maritime patrol aircraft would be severely limited by short on-station times. Submarines would be limited as well, in that the speeds required to keep up with surface ships, such as a convoy, would require sacrificing the advantage of silence because of cavitation. Furthermore, submarines cannot operate aircraft effectively. Therefore, it is the ASW-configured surface ship which provides the best tool for protecting ocean shipping, either in convoy or along a sea lane.<sup>17</sup> The Royal Navy's frigates, destroyers, and aircraft carriers are designed to meet this requirement. As pioneers in ASW helicopter operations, the British have placed helicopters on virtually all their surface ships. Working in conjunction with ship-mounted sonars and weapons, particularly American ships equipped with powerful passive sonars, the ASW helicopters would become the primary



defensive shield of a convoy, or the offensive weapon of a hunting group. In addition, the surface ships' air-defense missile batteries and guns would provide the convoys with some protection against submarine-launched cruise missiles. This task, like most tasks undertaken by the Royal Navy, will be shared with the United States Navy and the navies of Western Europe. However, the Royal Navy would provide the major surface effort in the Eastern Atlantic in any future Battle of the Atlantic.

In addition to these major tasks for the Royal Navy in wartime, there are other tasks which also require some attention as well. Should the United States Navy send a carrier strike force north of the GIUK Gap against Soviet bases on the Kola Peninsula, the Royal Navy would send an ASW group built around an aircraft carrier.<sup>18</sup> This possibility would depend upon the availability of ships, both American and British, and how the situation might develop. Another task would involve sending British troops, particularly the Royal Marines, to Norway as reinforcements. However, with the draw-down of British amphibious forces (a process slowed but not stopped by the Falklands War) the Royal Marines could only be sent to southern Norway by normal transport and then sent via railroad to the north. Although these tasks are possible due to the flexibility of seapower, the diminished size of the Royal Navy makes them rather impractical (except for sending the Marines to Norway by non-amphibious means)



to accomplish with the priority demands of the battle to protect sea-lines-of-communication.

#### D. ALTERNATIVE ROLES FOR THE ROYAL NAVY

The roles and tasks which the Royal Navy has taken on for itself do not solve all of Britain's maritime security problems in a European conflict. Although many alternative roles are well beyond British capabilities and resources to perform, these are alternatives which could significantly enhance Britain's military situation.

The present strategy has several weaknesses which could result in a failure of Britain's naval and military effort, even excluding the uncertainties of nuclear war. First, for the sea-lines-of-communication to be of value, NATO ground forces must contain a Soviet thrust in Central Europe and prolong the conflict. Furthermore, sufficient pre-war warning must be given for the United States to assemble the reinforcements and material to be shipped.<sup>19</sup> Even more crucial, the present planning has little to offer Britain should the Central Front collapse without use of nuclear weapons or the Soviets attack in the north rather than in Central Europe. In either case the Royal Navy would be of critical value.<sup>20</sup> Should one of these situations develop, the Navy must be prepared to meet the challenge.

Should the Central Front collapse without either side resorting to nuclear weapons, Britain would once again face



a potential invasion threat.<sup>21</sup> Although the elimination of the British Isles could be easily accomplished by using nuclear weapons, the potential costs of such an attack, including British nuclear retaliation against the Soviet Union, could make that option unacceptable to the Soviets. As a result, Britain could be in a situation similar to that in 1940. The Soviets could then seek to neutralize the British Isles by either mass conventional bombing and a close naval blockade (similar to the American operations against Japan in the summer of 1945), or they could attempt an amphibious landing, similar to the planned German Operation SEALION in 1940. For Britain to withstand the threat and survive, it would require not only air defenses capable of neutralizing Soviet air attacks, but naval forces able to counter Soviet naval moves around Britain as well.

The Royal Navy's task in such a dilemma would be to deny the Soviet Union the use of waters around the British Isles for amphibious operations and to maintain communications westward. Although the Navy presently is suited primarily for ASW operations, much of the threat in this scenario would be surface warships and amphibious forces. Therefore, the Royal Navy would require more anti-air warfare (AAW) and anti-surface vessel warfare (ASVW) capability. The ASVW mission would be shared with RAF Strike Command, but after combat losses on the Central Front and with the air battle over Britain raging, the RAF may have little to divert to





that mission. As a result the Navy must be prepared to fight the battle alone. Although the British could ultimately be overwhelmed by the Soviets, they could significantly raise the costs to the Soviets and thus perhaps deter a major sea-borne attack. Although this concept echoes Admiral Tirpitz's failed "Riskflotte"\* theory first espoused in 1900,<sup>22</sup> the enormous destructive potential of even light forces, the geography of the situation, the American naval threat to the Soviets, and the different goals for a British "risk fleet" (invasion deterrence, not war deterrence) could make such a strategy successful under these special conditions. Either way Britain's chance of survival is enhanced should the Central Front collapse.

To improve the Royal Navy's anti-surface capability, some changes would be required in the Navy's force structure. One reasonably economical measure would be to place anti-ship cruise missiles, such as the French EXOCET or American HARPOON, on all frigates and destroyers. Another measure would be the deployment of missile-armed light craft. Since the Soviets must approach the British Isles, numerous inexpensive coastal craft such as hydrofoils or surface-effect vessels (hovercraft) armed with cruise missiles could wreak

---

\* This theory held that any British effort to destroy the German fleet would result in such severe loss for the British, that they would lose naval supremacy over other rivals and therefore, Britain would be deterred from a naval war against Germany.



havoc on an approaching invasion force. Thirdly, a large force of short-range diesel submarines would be effective not only in countering an invasion threat, but would improve the ASW capability in British waters required by the present strategy. Finally, a larger mine warfare force, capable of extensive defensive mining operations could further inhibit Soviet naval operations around the British Isles. None of these steps would be overly expensive, and Britain's ability to withstand an invasion would be greatly enhanced.

Another major security problem which the Royal Navy is presently ill-equipped to counter is the possibility of a Soviet move in an area other than Central Europe. One possibility would be a Soviet move against Greece or Turkey, which would by Treaty obligate Britain to go to war with the Soviet Union. However, the Royal Navy no longer maintains a significant presence in the Mediterranean, and the major Allied naval effort in that sea would be undertaken by the U.S. and Mediterranean states. The other Soviet alternative would be a move in the North against Norway. "Indeed, if the Soviet Union actually intend (sic) to start a conventional war, Norway would arguably be the best place for them to do it."<sup>23</sup> Allied strength in that area is very low, and the Soviets might speculate that an attack combined with political pressure on the NATO nations in Central Europe could cause those nations to break their Treaty obligations, thus ending the NATO alliance. The Soviets could even choose a policy



of political coercion which could give them substantial pay-offs without war.<sup>24</sup> Whatever the case, a Soviet move against Norway could turn NATO's flank and pose a direct threat against Britain.

Whichever way the Soviets move against Norway, the British response would be principally naval. A Soviet attack would almost certainly involve airborne assaults against Norwegian airfields while amphibious forces seize ports such as Narvik. In such an area, Soviet airpower based on the Kola peninsula could effectively prevent British surface vessels from moving into the area. Unless the Royal Navy receives air cover from American aircraft carriers, the only effective weapon against the amphibious forces would be submarines. A mixture of nuclear and diesel submarines armed with cruise missiles as well as torpedoes could do considerable damage to Soviet amphibious forces around Norway. Although later consideration could be given to making an amphibious assault with the Royal Marines (with or without the United States Marines), such an operation would first require neutralization of the Soviet air threat and establishment of sea-control in Norwegian waters by surface as well as sub-surface units. Whatever reaction the British make to an attack, the Royal Navy will be their chief instrument.

Although Soviet naval and air superiority would limit the operational options of the Royal Navy, an attempt by the Soviets to threaten and coerce Norway with a show of force



would offer a wide range of reactions to the British. The arrival of a British task force off Norway and near a Soviet task force could act as an effective deterrent to a Soviet attack and stiffen the will of the Norwegian Government to withstand such overt pressure. For such a role, surface units, because of their visibility, would be the most effective show of force.<sup>25</sup> Although the Soviet Naval Air Force would still be a threat, cruise missile-armed surface ships would pose a threat to Soviet naval units that their aircraft would find difficult to pre-empt. The NATO Alliance could even choose to place a permanent deterrent in Northern waters by establishing another standing naval force, designated specifically for the Northern flank, and built around a British INVINCIBLE-class carrier, with Norwegian, German, Dutch, Belgian, and American ships participating.<sup>26</sup> A strong force of surface combatants, armed with anti-ship cruise missiles, as well as some anti-air capability, would offer Britain several choices in effectively dealing with a serious Soviet threat to a vulnerable but vital flank of both Britain and NATO.

#### E. THE NAVY'S FORCE STRUCTURE<sup>27</sup>

Despite recent cutbacks, Britain still possesses the largest and most capable European Navy in NATO. Its fleet is equipped with modern, sophisticated ships, weapons and technology. In order to fulfill its present roles and





missions, the Royal Navy maintains surface, subsurface, air, amphibious, and mine warfare capabilities.

Britain's large surface fleet possesses an all-around capability, including the operation of aircraft. The largest surface combatant in the fleet is the aircraft carrier HERMES, commissioned in 1959. This 28,700 ton (all tonnages full load) sole survivor of Britain's once great carrier fleet no longer operates normal fixed-wing aircraft, but carries five SEA HARRIER VSTOL jets and twelve SEA KING ASW helicopters. For self-defense, HERMES has two SEA CAT short-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) launchers. This ship will remain in service until completion of ARK ROYAL in 1985. The other major air-capable units are the INVINCIBLE-class light aircraft carriers of which two, INVINCIBLE and ILLUSTRIOUS, are in service and a third, ARK ROYAL, is under construction. These 19,500-ton ships each carry five SEA HARRIER jets and mine SEA KING helicopters and are armed with SEA DART SAM missiles. All these ships are capable of operating more aircraft if necessary, such as in the Falklands War when HERMES and INVINCIBLE operated twenty SEA HARRIERS each. Britain continues to maintain an aircraft carrier force.

The main body of the British surface fleet consists of destroyers and frigates. The destroyers are in three classes, the "County" class, the Type 82, and the Type 42. The older "County" class displace 6,200 tons and are armed with four



EXOCET cruise missiles, SEA SLUG and SEA CAT SAMs, and two 4.5 inch guns. Only three of the original eight ships in this class remain in service. The Type 82 class consists of only one ship, BRISTOL, which displaces 7,100 tons and is armed with SEA DART, a 4.5 inch gun, and the IKARA ASW rocket. The Type 42 class, which has nine ships in service and three under construction (two other ships, SHEFFIELD and COVENTRY, were sunk in the Falklands War), are armed with SEA DART and a 4.5 inch gun and displace 4,100 tons. All British destroyers except BRISTOL carry ASW helicopters.

The frigates likewise can be broken down in several classes. The oldest frigate in the fleet is the TORQUAY, the only surviving WHITBY-class unit in service. It displaces 2,560 tons, is armed with two 4.5 inch guns and a LIMBO ASW mortar, and is used as a training and testing ship. There also remains in service three "Tribal" class ships of 2,700 tons and armed with SEA CAT, two 4.5 inch guns, and LIMBO. Eight of the original nine ROTHESAY-class frigates remain in service (though one now serves as a trials ship). These ships displace 2,800 tons and are armed with SEACAT, two 4.5 inch guns, LIMBO, and carry an ASW helicopter. The largest class in service is the LEANDER-class with twenty-four ships still in service (two others transferred to New Zealand). The armament varies in this class, with nine units having two 4.5 inch guns, SEACAT and LIMBO, eight units having EXOCET, SEACAT, and torpedo tubes, and the other seven having IKARA,



LIMBO, and SEACAT. All units carry an ASW helicopter. The Type-21 frigates displace 3,250 tons and are armed with EXOCET, SEACAT, a 4.5 inch gun, and carry an ASW helicopter. Six ships of the class are in service (two others, ARDENT and ANTELOPE were sunk off the Falklands). The newest class of frigates in service are the Type 22, of which five are in service and eight more are under construction or are on order. These ships are armed with the SEA WOLF SAM, which has proven effective against even cruise missiles, EXOCET, torpedo tubes, and an ASW helicopter. A newer class, the Type 23, is still in the planning stages, with no ships on order. Although the present British force structure includes thirteen destroyers and forty-seven frigates, that force is currently scheduled to be reduced to fifty units during the 1980s. These ships, however, will continue to carry out the tasks which require surface ships.

Britain maintains a substantial submarine force which is becoming the principal arm of the Royal Navy. The backbone of this force is the nuclear-power attack submarine (SSN), of which Britain has eleven, six of SWIFTSURE-class and five of the VALIANT-class. In addition, five new vessels of the TRAFALGAR-class are under construction or on order. All these SSN's are armed with torpedoes, and plans are being considered to buy the American HARPOON anti-ship cruise missile, which can be fired from torpedo tubes while submerged. Britain also operates thirteen OBERON-class diesel-electric



submarines armed with torpedoes. Two older PORPOISE-class submarines are also still in service but are being phased out. A new class of conventional-powered submarines is currently under design as well. Britain's mixture of nuclear-powered and conventional-powered attack submarines gives the Royal Navy the capability to carry out submarine missions and tasks both in British waters and over the entire North Atlantic area.

Although land-based maritime patrol aircraft are under RAF control, all sea-based aviation is part of the Fleet Air Arm (FAA). The FAA currently operates the SEA HARRIER VSTOL strike aircraft which proved successful in the Falklands War. This very maneuverable plane is capable of 640 knots speed and is capable of carrying guns, bombs, rockets, and SIDE-WINDER air-to-air missiles. The Navy currently has around thirty SEA HARRIERs in service, and more on order. In addition to the strike aircraft, the FAA also has over a hundred ASW helicopters of the SEA KING, LYNX, WASP, and WESSEX types. The SEA KING, operated off the carriers can carry a dipping sonar, torpedoes, depth charges or a radar. The LYNX, operated off the newer-type destroyers and frigates, can carry torpedoes or depth charges. The WASP, operated off the older frigates, and the WESSEX, on the "County" class destroyers, are also capable of carrying ASW torpedoes. It is these aircraft and helicopters, which provide the seaborne air strike, air defense, and the ASW capability for the Royal Navy.





The Royal Navy today continues to maintain an amphibious capability. This force was scheduled to be drawn down, but its successful performance in the Falklands War has won it a reprieve. The major units of this force are two 12,120 ton amphibious assault ships, FEARLESS and INTREPID, capable of carrying 400 to 700 troops (depending on distance to be carried) plus tanks and helicopters. Backing these two ships up are five 5,674 ton logistics landing ships of the SIR LANCELOT class which can carry tanks and other combat vehicles. A sixth ship of this class, the SIR GALAHAD, was sunk in the Falklands War. Finally, each of Britain's aircraft carriers is capable of carrying a helicopter commando force, if necessary. Amphibious forces still remain a part of the Royal Navy.

The arm of the Royal Navy which would utilize that capability is the 7,900 man Royal Marines. The principal organization unit of this force is the Commando, a battalion size formation. As the name Commando implies, the Royal Marines specialize in commando-style operations using both landing craft and helicopters. The Royal Marines, combined with Britain's amphibious assault ships, give the Navy the capability to project power ashore.

Because of Britain's geography and the nature of the threat, the Royal Navy maintains a substantial mine-sweeping capability. The newest MCM vessels are the HUNT-class with six in service and five more under construction. In addition,



Britain has twenty-eight "Ton" class, one WILTON class, and two VENTURER class sweepers and hunters in service. These vessels are mostly small craft with only a coastal mine-sweeping capability. The Royal Navy currently operates no mine layers, but its mine sweepers give Britain some defense against an offensive mining campaign.

#### F. THE ROYAL NAVY AND ITS ALLIES

Any future European war would involve not only Britain, but its European and North American allies as well. Accordingly, any understanding of the Royal Navy's wartime role requires an understanding of the degree that it cooperates with the allied navies.

The most important of the allied fleets for Britain is the United States Navy. Its Atlantic Fleet has a complete range of capabilities, including fleet aircraft carriers, numerous cruisers, destroyers, frigates, and nuclear-powered attack submarines, and a large amphibious force. Any Royal Navy effort beyond British waters would require the cooperation and assistance of that fleet to be successful. The battle of the GIUK Gap and of the trans-Atlantic sea lanes would require substantial numbers of American submarines and surface vessels. Any attempt to project sea control off Northern Norway would require American carrier air cover. The Royal Navy has become dependent on the United States Navy to carry out its mission.



The spirit of cooperation, however, between the two navies is a strong one. The experience of cooperation in two world wars, along with the NATO Alliance and shared threat perceptions, has allowed that spirit to flourish. The two navies today engage in numerous joint exercises. Tactical skills and training procedures are shared between the navies. Surface units of both fleets routinely operate together as members of STANAVFORLANT. In wartime, the Royal Navy would provide both the commander and the forces for Anti-Submarine Group Two, which would be the major ASW component of NATO Strike Fleet Atlantic, a carrier strike force almost exclusively American in composition.<sup>28</sup> Though the Royal Navy is to a degree dependent on the United States Navy to carry out its missions, the degree of cooperation between the two navies makes American naval support in a European war a near certainty.

The Royal Navy cooperates with the European navies as well, particularly those of West Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, and Norway. British naval forces regularly exercise with ships from these nations and occasionally French units as well.<sup>29</sup> Britain contributes a destroyer or frigate to STANAVFORLANT, where it operates with similar ships from the other NATO navies. The Royal Navy also provides leadership as well as ships to STANAVFORCHAN, a NATO MCM force which operates in the English Channel and the southern part of the North Sea. This force also draws units from the West German, Belgian, and Dutch navies. Britain and the Netherlands also cooperate



on amphibious operations. The Royal Netherlands Marine Corps has earmarked certain units to become part of the British Commando Forces Royal Marines, which would provide support for Norway should a Soviet northern offensive become apparent. The Royal Navy is an alliance navy, and cooperation with other navies in that alliance is a feature of Royal Navy operations in the North Atlantic area.

The Royal Navy today is confronted with a great dilemma. It is confronted with the greatest naval threat in its history, and yet its ability to counter that threat has never been more limited. Britain cannot meet every threat, so it must choose which threats it will counter and tailor its Navy accordingly. Its choices will determine the Navy's future.

Presently, Britain has chosen the submarine threat to trans-Atlantic sea lines of communication as the threat it will counter, and the emphasis on submarines and land-based air reflect that choice. However, other threats exist that are either more grave, such as invasion if the Central Front collapses, or more likely, such as an attack on Norway. To meet these threats within the framework of limited defense resources will require a fundamental re-assessment of Britain's role in NATO, particularly the ground forces commitment in Germany. Whether the British Government is willing to pay the potential political costs that such a reappraisal would bring remains to be seen. However, should war actually occur, the very survival of Britain as an independent, free nation may depend on such a move.





The British have historically dealt with their European security problems principally through naval power. A major ground forces commitment on the European Continent is so historically unprecedented as to appear "unnatural" for Britain. The Navy's present role in Europe is centered around supporting such a commitment. Any change in the role will depend on a return to Britain's maritime traditions. If such a shift can be accomplished within NATO, the security of both Britain and the Alliance could be significantly enhanced. Britain's power in Europe would again find its embodiment in the Royal Navy.



## FOOTNOTES

1. John Moore, ed., Jane's Fighting Ships 1983-84 (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1983).
2. Ministry of Defence, Statement on the Defence Estimates 1982 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1982), p. 24.
3. Lawrence W. Martin, "The Domestic Content of British Defense Policy," The Internal Fabric of Western Security, ed. Gregory Flynn (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 155.
4. Ministry of Defence, Statement on the Defence Estimates 1983 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1983), p. 12.
5. Paul Beaver, Encyclopedia of the Modern Royal Navy (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982), p. 25.
6. Ibid., p. 23.
7. James Cable, Britain's Naval Future (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1983), p. 91.
8. Winston S. Churchill II, Defending the West (Westport, Ct.: Arlington House, 1918), p. 111.
9. Cable, p. 87.
10. Beaver, p. 35.
11. Cable, p. 98.
12. Beaver, p. 19.
13. Jonathan Alford, "The Choices for British Defence Policy," (In German in Europe Archiv, 1983), p. 7.
14. Ibid., p. 4.
15. Cable, p. 98.
16. Ibid.
17. Geoffrey Till, Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 193.



18. Cable, p. 127.
19. James Cable, "Britain's Choice of Threats," Proceedings, 954 (August 1982), p. 27.
20. Cable, Britain's Naval Future, p. 109.
21. Ibid., p. 161.
22. Ibid., p. 162.
23. Ibid., p. 115.
24. Ibid., p. 116.
25. Ibid., p. 121.
26. James Jungius, "Maritime Aspects of the Northern Flank," RUSI Journal 123, No. 4 (December, 1978), 19.
27. Source for all ship and aircraft data: Moore, pp. 166-168, 578-618.
28. Beaver, p. 26.
29. Ibid., p. 22.



## V. THE ROYAL NAVY BEYOND EUROPE

The third major arena of power which involves the Royal Navy is the global arena. The Royal Navy today continues to fulfill its historic role as protector of British interests beyond Europe. As Britain's once great empire has been dismantled and former colonies and dependencies have received their independence, British security interests have decreased around the globe. Simultaneously, Britain's once global navy has been reduced to being a largely European navy with little presence beyond north Atlantic waters. However, some interests do remain - legacies of Empire, treaty commitments, and economic resources important to Britain and its allies. It is these interests that demand occasional and sometimes substantial involvement by the Royal Navy beyond its primary theater of operation. The Royal Navy continues to have a small but significant role beyond Europe.

### A. THE TRADITIONAL ROLE BEYOND EUROPE

Traditionally, the primary function of the Royal Navy beyond Europe has been the defense of the British Empire. For centuries Britain's many far-flung possessions and the sea commerce between those possessions and Britain required protection. Squadrons of cruisers, gunboats, and in certain circumstances battleships patrolled the seas throughout the reaches of the Empire. In fact, many of Britain's colonial





outposts were nothing more than refueling stations and supply depots for the Navy. The Royal Navy was the power on which the British Empire rested.

The Navy served not only a defensive purpose, but a more active one as well. It permitted Britain to intervene in almost any crisis it chose, and to make its will felt around the world. "It was the prestige of the Royal Navy which enabled Britain to succeed on the grand scale, by exercising an authority on the shores of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and on the Mediterranean Sea, out of all proportion to its resources and population."<sup>1</sup> The presence of British warships was a very real and significant factor in international diplomacy around the world. The Royal Navy was the standard bearer as well as defender of Britain and British interests.

#### B. END OF THE GLOBAL NAVY

Since the end of the Second World War, the Royal Navy's global role has changed dramatically. The end of Empire and drastic financial retrenchment of the British defense establishment have served to fundamentally alter both the missions and capability of the Navy beyond Europe.

The first decade after the war saw the Royal Navy carrying on much as it had before the war. Britain still had the second largest navy in the world, including a large aircraft carrier force. Though India was now independent, the remainder of Britain's empire in Africa and Asia needed protection, and British warships dominated the Indian Ocean.



Yet, without India, the remainder of the Empire had lost its *raison d'être*. In fact, "...the maintenance of Britain's role east of Suez was more important for the Royal Navy than was the role of the Royal Navy for the maintenance of Britain's position east of Suez."<sup>2</sup> However, the Suez fiasco of 1956 ended the complacency of Empire. As the pace of decolonization rapidly accelerated, the role of the Navy changed.

The decade following Suez marked the last great era of the Royal Navy as a global fleet. Initially following Suez, the mood among British leaders was to cut back on conventional forces, and the carriers, on which Britain's global role was based, were prime targets.<sup>3</sup> However, navy supporters resisted the cuts and by 1961 the mood had changed. As various colonies received independence and imperial outposts were abandoned, the Navy's carriers were seen as substitutes and mobile forces built around the carriers would be the maintainers of British presence in the Indian Ocean.<sup>4</sup> Intervention in Kuwait in 1961 to deter an Iraqi attack was successful and increased British confidence. Labour took office in 1964 determined to maintain the British presence east of Suez. Britain's carrier fleet was aging, so a new class of fleet carriers was planned. However, economic realities soon shattered British strategy east of Suez. The financial crisis of 1966 resulted in major military cutbacks, including cancellation of the new aircraft carriers. The fate of Britain's carrier fleet was sealed. Two years later



came the stunning announcement of the end of British presence east of Suez. By 1971 almost all British forces would be gone from the Indian Ocean. The Royal Navy was no longer a global fleet.

#### C. THE NAVY'S ROLE BEYOND EUROPE SINCE 1971

Since the end of Britain's major presence east of Suez in 1971, Britain has maintained only token forces beyond Europe. These have consisted mainly of a few scattered units protecting remaining imperial commitments, or an occasional showing of the flag, but reflect no major naval effort. "Britain's remaining overseas dependencies in the Caribbean, South Atlantic, and Indian Ocean lie outside NATO boundaries, and their protection has been left by the planners to such ad hoc support as can be cobbled together from time to time."<sup>4</sup> During the last decade, Britain has maintained a frigate at Gibraltar as guardship, an occasional frigate at Belize to deter Guatemala, and a few MCM vessels at Hong Kong. Occasional around-the-world cruises were made by small groups of ships, and Britain has participated in the Beira Patrol in the Mozambique Channel and sent units to Oman when war broke out between Iran and Iraq. Even these small distractions have been a burden on an already overstretched fleet at home. "Many years, however, must elapse before Britain attains a comfortably insular outlook and finally pays off the death duties of her imperial past."<sup>5</sup> These few commitments will remain into the future.



#### D. THE FALKLANDS WAR

On 2 April 1982, Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, a British colony, and initiated a war for which the Royal Navy had not prepared. Despite the tremendous decline in the Royal Navy's power projection capability since 1971, Prime Minister Thatcher was determined to fight. What resulted was a war fought through brilliant improvisation in which the Royal Navy demonstrated a capability which it had abandoned.

Britain promptly responded by assembling a fleet to send to the South Atlantic. The core of that force was the old carrier HERMES, due for disposal in a few years, and the light carrier INVINCIBLE, which was to be sold to Australia. Along with these ships would ultimately go eight destroyers, fifteen frigates, both of Britain's amphibious assault ships, and numerous supporting units. A large number of merchant ships were also mobilized to carry supplies, equipment, or, as in the case of the ocean liners QUEEN ELIZABETH II and CANBERRA, troops. Even while this force was being assembled, British submarines were converging on the Falklands to establish an exclusion zone around the islands. By 5 April, the fleet sailed for the South Atlantic, taking with it most of Britain's naval strength. "The Task Force took some 70% of the British naval and maritime air contribution to NATO, which left gaps in the defense of the Western Approaches, the significance of which has yet to be assessed."<sup>6</sup> But for the moment NATO had taken a back seat to a group of islands 8,000 miles away.





The long voyage south permitted the troops and sailors to train and prepare for the coming battle, while diplomatic channels were being exhausted. To support the move, the British showed incredible ingenuity in establishing a logistics chain. "It was by any standards a brilliant campaign, marked by exceptional logistic planning and improvisation, and carried through with outstanding skill and fortitude."<sup>7</sup> The entire movement south was conducted without loss, and the logistics train was maintained 8,000 miles from Britain.

By the time the fleet reached the area, diplomatic efforts had failed, and the British seized the initiative. On 25 April, Royal Marines landed on South Georgia Island, 700 miles east of the Falklands, and captured the Argentina forces there. Four days later, the fleet arrived off the Falklands and on 1 May, the British began air attacks on the Port Stanley airfield. The next day, Britain scored a naval success when the submarine CONQUEROR torpedoed and sank the Argentine cruiser GENERAL BELGRANO. After that, the Argentine Navy never again attempted to interfere with the Royal Navy's operations. By seizing the initiative, the British Navy now controlled the waters around the Falkland Islands.

Soon however, the Argentine Air Force struck back, and the Royal Navy found itself fighting its first major battle since 1945. On 4 May, an EXOCET missile launched from an Argentine SUPER ETENDARD struck the destroyer SHEFFIELD,



mortally damaging it. For the remainder of the month and into June, the British fleet underwent a series of massive air attacks from Argentine MIRAGE and SKYHAWK jets. The aircraft were met by the British HARRIER VSTOL attack planes armed with SIDEWINDER air-to-air missiles, and by the fleet's air defense missiles and guns. Over seventy Argentine aircraft were downed by the British defenders during the conflict, but British losses were also heavy. On 21 May the frigate ARDENT was overwhelmed and sunk by bombs. Three days later, its sister ship ANTELOPE sank when a bomb detonated in its engine room. On 25 May Argentine bombing attacks overwhelmed and sank the destroyer COVENTRY. The same day two air-launched EXOCET missiles hit the containership ATLANTIC CONVEYOR, sending it to the bottom. Though the major British landings had been on 21 May, the Argentine effort against British amphibious forces climaxed on 8 June, when Argentine jets managed to sink the landing ship SIR GALAHAD and cripple the SIR TRISTAM. Throughout the campaign other ships had also taken less severe damage and five HARRIERS had been shot down. On 14 June the Argentine garrison on the Falklands formally surrendered to the British invasion force. Britain had won a startling, but expensive victory.

Not surprisingly, the Falklands War brought out several lessons about the Royal Navy, illustrating both strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, the degree of professionalism and skill of the British sailors was outstanding. Furthermore,



the Navy had shown an incredible degree of flexibility in carrying out the campaign. Some aspects of the Navy's force structure were also vindicated, including the INVINCIBLE class light carrier, the amphibious forces, the nuclear-powered attack submarine, and the HARRIER jumpjet.

On the negative side several weaknesses were shown in the force structure. First, the focus on Europe resulted in no warships being in the South Atlantic at the time of invasion to either interfere or deter. "A British naval presence would probably have prevented the attempt and saved many lives on both sides."<sup>8</sup> Second, the emphasis on ASW had allowed other capabilities to atrophy. "The British were sharply reminded of the desirability of having armed forces with a variety of capabilities not necessarily tailored to one threat."<sup>9</sup> Two problems in particular cost the British dearly. The lack of any airborne early warning (AEW) capability allowed the Argentine aircraft to achieve a degree of surprise, and the lack of an effective anti-ship-missile-defense (ASMD) capability on most ships resulted in the loss of the SHEFFIELD. However, the great lesson of the war was that the Royal Navy can still project global power. "Britain has proved itself once again, to be one of three, or possibly four countries capable of mounting and sustaining a conflict 8000 miles from its home base."<sup>10</sup>

The Falklands War had had several repercussions on the postwar Royal Navy. Several ships marked for disposal have



been saved. The sale of INVINCIBLE to Australia has been cancelled, as has the paying off of the destroyers GLAMORGAN, FIFE, and BRISTOL, and the amphibious assault ships FEARLESS and INTREPID. Four new Type 22 frigates have been ordered to replace the destroyers and frigates sunk in the South Atlantic. As for the deficiencies in AEW and ASMD, a few WESSEX helicopters are now being converted to an AEW role, and the American VULCAN PHALANX close-in weapon system is being fitted to all major combatants. Finally, now at least one frigate is being kept on station in the South Atlantic to deter a repeat of 1982. The Falklands War has reinvigorated the Royal Navy and has preserved for a time Britain's role beyond Europe.

The Royal Navy's global role still survives, despite the dismantling of the British Empire and severe financial constraints. Though Britain's naval presence beyond Europe is small, it does demand certain important resources. "One distant ship, after all needs two more to back it up, to say nothing of the demands of logistics support."<sup>11</sup> Many British have begun to question even these small entanglements, but the prospects for final termination of the remaining naval involvements beyond Europe have been dimmed by the Falklands War. The Royal Navy will continue to operate some forces around the globe in the immediate future.

However, Britain will never again attempt to maintain a significant peacetime naval presence beyond Europe. In the





case of war with the Soviet Union, the global activities of the Royal Navy will have even less importance. "Naval defence, no less than charity, begins at home and, if there is to be general war, is likely to end there - for the Royal Navy."<sup>12</sup> But should a limited war develop beyond Europe that directly threatens British interests, a replay of 1982 is possible. Though Great Britain's role as a global naval power may be history, the Falklands War at least proved the Royal Navy can project considerable power in a crisis far from the British Isles.



## FOOTNOTES

1. K. Booth, Navies and Foreign Policy (New York: Crane, Russak, and Co., 1977), p. 59.
2. Ibid., p. 100.
3. Phillip Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez 1947-1968 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 99.
4. John O. Coote, "Send Her Victorious...", Proceedings, 959 (January 1983), p. 40.
5. James Cable, Britain's Naval Future, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1983), p. 148.
6. Edgar O' Ballance, "The Falkland Islands Campaign," National Defence, September 1982, p. 42.
7. John Nott, "The Falklands Campaign," Proceedings 963 (May 1983), p. 120.
8. James Cable, "Britain's Choice of Threats," Proceedings 954 (August, 1982), p. 32.
9. J.V.P. Goldrick, "Reflections on the Falklands," Proceedings 964 (June, 1983), p. 102.
10. Gregory Copley, "The Falklands War: Update," Defense and Foreign Affairs, May 1982, p. 49.
11. Cable, Britain's Naval Threat, p. 141.
12. Ibid.



## VI. THE ROYAL NAVY IN AN ERA OF CONSTRAINED RESOURCES

Any consideration of the Royal Navy's future role in British defense policy must be viewed in terms of the economic and political constraints under which British policymakers must operate. These constraints are the result of Britain's relative decline as a leading power in the international system during this century, especially since the Second World War, and the political evolution of British society. Their impact has been to cause tremendous competition for defense resources among Britain's three armed services and within the Navy itself. As the 1981 Defense White Paper The Way Forward expressed the dilemma for the Navy, "...we have to think hard about how we can most cost effectively shape our contribution for the future, with account taken both of resource constraints and of technological change."<sup>1</sup>

How British decisionmakers distribute these resources and shape that contribution is determined by a number of considerations: strategic and tactical, political and diplomatic, economic, technological, and institutional. Habit and tradition, and the British penchant for "muddling through" also affect defense decisionmaking. These factors, working in various combinations, have shaped the modern British defense establishment and the Navy's role in that establishment, including its size, equipment, deployment, and missions, and



the distribution of those resources and missions among its various components.

#### A. CONSTRAINTS

All British defense policy today is made under certain constraints which have shaped that policy to various degrees over long periods of time. The dimensions and impact of these constraints have grown or diminished as Britain's economic and political fortunes and its international position have changed.

By far the greatest constraint on Britain's armed forces is the economic stringency which has come to characterize British political life. As former Prime Minister Edward Heath has observed, "We tend to give less attention to the basic strategy which our forces should be adopting than to the particular problems which arise out of the financial circumstances."<sup>2</sup> This dilemma is by no means a new development. "The history of British defence policy is of an attempt to reconcile the mismatch between resources and commitments."<sup>3</sup> This mismatch is the result of the great relative economic decline Britain has experienced in this century. "Throughout the twentieth century, British defense policy has been pursued in a context of relative economic decline."<sup>4</sup>

This decline has been attributed to a multitude of factors. First, Britain has been dependent on imports since the early days of the industrial revolution. This resulted from the





population boom in Britain at the time, which outstripped British agriculture's ability to feed that population. Also, the British Isles were largely bereft of any natural resources other than coal, which industrialization required. The British Empire did provide much of the required imports, but as the colonies developed their own political and economic identities, the capital spent on imports was largely lost to the British nation.

Second, the British economy has never had a particularly high rate of growth. Instead, Britain had a long, steady, sustained, but somewhat slow growth rate. Much of Britain's economic advantage in the nineteenth century resulted from their "head start" in industrialization and not in a fast growth rate. As a result, when Germany and the United States industrialized on a massive scale, their growth rate soon swept them ahead of Britain in economic might. Third, social change in the form of a growing complacency, particularly among the managerial class, resulted in the failure of British industry to innovate or modernize in the face of the American and German challenges. Despite these dilemmas and trends, Britain entered the twentieth century still commanding a preeminent position in the world economy.

Soon, however, events of the new century would soon sharply accelerate Britain's decline. Principal among these events in their impact on the British economy were the two world wars. World War One transformed Britain into a debtor



nation and killed much of Britain's brightest future leadership. The Second World War drove Britain deeper in debt and left it totally eclipsed economically by the United States. Then following that war came the great dismantling of the British Empire. Although some have claimed that the Empire was more of a drain than a source of wealth, it did take away sources of relatively cheap raw materials at a time when competition for such resources on the international market was intensifying.

Another factor in the economic decline has been the growth of the post-war welfare state and the power of the British labor unions. The evergrowing demands of the welfare state have taken away much of the capital which Britain's nationalized industry needs for growth and modernization, while union demands have driven up the costs of British goods to a point that British industry has become inefficient and uncompetitive in the international market. Finally the contraction of the British defense establishment has created a special problem for defense industries, as the present British forces offer an insufficient market to make extensive research and development expenditures or large (and therefore more economical) production runs practicable. All of these factors have combined to make the British industrial and economic base for the armed forces insufficient to meet Britain's security needs.



The greatest impact of the economic constraints has been, of course, that they limit the size and capability of the British defense establishment. The extent to which this has an impact can be discerned from Table One, which details total British military expenditure between 1972 and 1981:

Table One

<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>
17,987	17,764	18,145	18,136	18,482
<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
17,712	18,291	19,121	20,649	19,901

Note: Figures in 1979 US Million's of \$

SOURCE: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, World Armaments and Disarmament SIPRI Yearbook 1982 (Cambridge, Mass.; Oelschlager, Gunn, and Hain, Inc., 1982), p. 141.

These figures, which cover the period after the retreat from east of Suez and the retrenchments of the Wilson Government, indicate a 1981 defense budget only ten percent higher than the 1972 budget. Yet, during this period most of the equipment purchased by the Ministry of Defense has undergone a real cost increase of between six and ten percent per annum.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the entire defense establishment has shrunk.

Economic constraints have directly affected security policy in other ways as well. Overseas military activity, particularly in Germany, has become part of the balance of payments issue. Also British security policy is affected by



economic issues with the European Economic Community. Finally, the dependence of the British arms industry on exports has affected the equipment programs of British forces as well as its foreign customers. Economic constraints have dominated British military policy in many ways.

Closely related to the economic constraints are the political constraints which determine the distribution of the resources which are available. These constraints have steadily grown more severe as Britain's welfare state has grown. Not only have taxes and labor union demands eroded the financial underpinnings of British industry and the ability of the economy to generate wealth, but the great demand for increasing social expenditure has diverted away much of the wealth that has been created. The British people have come to expect and demand improved social services, higher pay, and more economic benefits from a government and national economy hardly capable of satisfying these demands. "The British people have become less interested in the security of their islands and their essential imports than in their own immediate and personal welfare."<sup>6</sup>

This trend is shared with other Western nations to various degrees, and politicians find it very difficult to oppose. "The budget constraints on defence expenditure are very great indeed in all the democracies, with almost irresistible pressures from electorates (on governments anxious to secure a further term of office) to devote any





resources that may be available and even resources that are not available but have to be borrowed to provide a high and ever-rising standard of living and level of social benefits."<sup>7</sup> As a result of this political pressure, many politicians have found it convenient to cut costs in other areas, such as the military. "It is hard to resist the conclusion that there is a long-standing and persistent trend in the political evolution of the industrialized democracies which is adverse to be the maintenance of an effective defence."<sup>8</sup> This trend has been particularly strong in Britain.

As a result, the relationship between defense spending and social spending has changed dramatically. Whereas in 1955 British defense spending accounted for 27.4% of government expenditure while social security accounted for 17.7%, in 1980 defense spending was down to 11.6% while social security had risen to 28.0% of total government expenditure.<sup>9</sup> This fundamental reordering of national priorities is extremely difficult, if not impossible to reverse in a liberal democracy, though the Thatcher Government has made some progress in stemming the tide. Mrs. Thatcher took office determined to reduce social expenditure while maintaining a strong defense. In 1982 Britain spent 5.1% of its Gross Domestic Product on defense, a greater percentage than any of the European allies except Greece and Turkey.<sup>10</sup> Yet even the Thatcher Government has found some contraction of the defense establishment necessary. As The Way Forward stated, "Our



current force structure is however too large for us to meet this need within any resource allocation which our people can reasonably be asked to afford."<sup>11</sup> The political dynamics and realities of social democracy will continue to be a powerful constraint on British defense spending.

Technology shapes the distribution of defense resources in two ways. First, it defines what is achievable by investing in a particular aspect of military capability. For example, the technology of combat jet aircraft is such that they are a potent air defense weapon, and therefore worth the expenditure, while the currently available technology for laser beam ballistic missile defense is such that Britain would gain little from investing in such a program. Second, technology accentuates the burden of increasing costs of new developments on a military fully committed to "high technology." As research and development costs of new technology increase at a rate greater than economic growth, this commitment will become more difficult to maintain, and some adjusting will be necessary. In fact, the conceding of strategic missile development for British forces to the Americans reflects such an adjustment. Technology will continue to affect the allocation of defense resources.

Other factors in the competition for defense resources include institutional constraints which combine with habit and tradition to shape some of the bureaucratic conflicts fought between the three services and within the Navy itself.



Although these conflicts are often waged in jargon based on strategic or tactical terms, personal emotion and sentiment are also frequently apparent. Until recently British policy-makers have dealt with this dilemma by distributing the misery of necessary cuts equally among the three services, but since The Way Forward was presented, these conflicts are again stirring.<sup>12</sup> Institutional constraints, habit, and tradition continue to affect British defense policy.

Finally, the British penchant for "muddling through" has had major impact on the allotment of resources. This has come about as a result of the British determination to maintain a force which covers the full spectrum of military capability.<sup>13</sup> Though this has led the British to maintain an absurdly small capability in some areas, the effectiveness of such efforts is never questioned. Instead, the policymakers merely insist on retaining those capabilities and hope for the best. This approach to defense continues to affect British security policy.

## B. COMPETITION WITH THE OTHER SERVICES

It is within these constraints that the Royal Navy must compete with the other two services for resources. In this competition the Navy has had some real advantages over its rivals. Above all, Britain is an island nation with a seafaring tradition which has given first priority to naval power for over 400 years, a tradition which is very difficult



to cast off. However, the retreat from Empire and the post war situation in Central Europe have left the Royal Navy vulnerable to being superceded by the other services on both strategic and diplomatic grounds. As a result, the Navy has experienced both success and failure in the continuing competition with the Army and Air Force.

One dimension of military power in which the Navy has successfully competed for resources is that of Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent. The Navy came by its role as the service principally responsible for the strategic deterrent as a result of political and diplomatic expediency, although economic and technological constraints had created the situation in which the change took place. From its inception until the end of 1962 the nuclear force was the exclusive domain of the Royal Air Force and its V-bombers. However, when economic constraints and concern over the vulnerability of land-based ballistic missiles led to the cancellation of the BLUE STREAK Program, which was to ultimately replace the bombers, the British sought the economical solution of purchasing the American SKYBOLT air-to-surface nuclear missile. The resulting SKYBOLT Affair and the ensuing Nassau Conference passed the responsibility of the nuclear deterrent to the Royal Navy, when Britain elected to purchase the American POLARIS system. Since then the POLARIS force has remained in service and received updates such as the CHEVALINE program while the VULCAN bomber





force has been gradually phased out of the nuclear strike role. The Royal Navy has become the sole possessor of British strategic nuclear weapons.

The British Government's recent decision to acquire TRIDENT as a successor to POLARIS also reflects economic and technological constraints. The principal alternative to TRIDENT was considered to be cruise missiles, launched from either land or sea. Though a sea-launched system would have left the nuclear deterrent a Navy responsibility, land-based cruise missiles would belong to one of the other services. In addition to the military considerations, strong financial arguments were made for both cruise missiles and for TRIDENT. For the cruise missile, the low cost of the missile and associated launch platforms (compared to a ballistic missile submarine) was attractive. However, the counter-argument for TRIDENT held that a cruise missile program which matched the striking power and security of TRIDENT would demand such a quantity of missiles and launch platforms, that the cruise missile program would cost more in the long run.<sup>14</sup> Technological considerations also favor TRIDENT, as ballistic missiles are much more difficult to defend against than cruise missiles. Also, the British have become comfortable with the POLARIS force, and institutional inertia favors a similar force. Although these considerations were not the only factors involved in determining the choice of TRIDENT, they were certainly important. The decision



keeps the strategic nuclear deterrent the exclusive role of the Royal Navy.

The major battle for resources and money, however, has been between the Navy's conventional fleet and the Army and Air Force presence in the Federal Republic of Germany. This battle has come about as a result of Britain's economic dilemma, which has made the maintenance of both a balanced, capable fleet and a substantial military presence in Central Europe no longer feasible. Both sides have put forth convincing arguments for their respective cases.

For the BAOR, the argument is based principally on military and diplomatic grounds, with some economic reasons also considered. The basic strategic argument holds that since the main Soviet threat is in Central Europe, the best place to confront that threat is Central Europe. Also the physical presence of troops provides a very visible, and therefore stronger, deterrent than would ships at sea. Diplomatically, the case for the BAOR is even stronger. Britain is obligated under the 1954 amendments to the 1948 Brussels Treaty, as modified in 1957, to maintain 55,000 troops in Germany. This presence contributes to keeping the United States Army in Europe and therefore the American nuclear guarantee to Europe intact.<sup>15</sup> It also keeps Britain an active member in the European community and keeps ties with the Bonn Government close. A decision to withdraw the BAOR, or even to substantially reduce it, could set off a series of withdrawals



among the other allies, particularly the United States, greatly reduce British influence in Europe, damage relations with the Federal Republic of Germany, and revive French fears of a resurgent unfettered Germany. Economically, the British voice in the EEC could also be diminished by such a withdrawal. These arguments make a very strong case for the BAOR's continuing presence in Central Europe, "Despite all the financial pressures on our defence effort, the Government has decided that this contribution is so important to the Alliance's military posture and its political cohesion that it must be maintained."<sup>16</sup>

Supporters of the Navy counter these arguments with a strong case of their own, based on military considerations, tradition, and some economic reasoning as well. The strategic arguments for the Navy center around Britain's vulnerability to maritime interdiction, the serious Soviet threat to the Northern flank, the great flexibility of sea-power, and Britain's unique position as the strongest European naval power in the NATO Alliance. This last point also reflects the impact of tradition. Britain has its tradition as a seapower first and foremost. Furthermore, British leaders have historically eschewed a continental commitment, and even today the very idea of an Army in Europe is frowned upon in many Army as well as Navy circles. Finally, the adverse economic effects on the balance of payments of maintaining the BAOR have been noted as a reason



for ending the troop commitment to Germany. The Navy supporters, like the Army supporters, have made a strong case for their position.

The battle was supposedly settled in 1981, with The Way Forward. This document explicitly stated that the Navy would be cut back while the BAOR would be maintained. As for the Navy's future, it declared, "A rather smaller but modern fleet with less heavy overheads will give better value for defense resources."<sup>17</sup> Although the Navy supporters continued to grumble, the battle was lost. Then, in 1982, came the Falklands War. This conflict offered a textbook demonstration of the flexibility and value of naval power. The result has been a re-invigorated pro-Navy campaign and the cancellation of a few of the cutbacks already ordered. However, the economic constraints and underlying principles behind the previous decisions also remain, thus setting the stage for another battle. "There seems little prospect that the defence budget will be allowed to rise ever higher, so the conclusion is that the battle for defence resources, which appeared to have been settled decisively against the Navy in 1981, is not only to be refought but that another turn of the budgetary screw may force it to be even more intense."<sup>18</sup> However, the Thatcher Government remains committed to the BAOR. The Navy's prospects in the upcoming resource battle are therefore still doubtful.





Recently, the Navy has also faced a challenge from the Air Force for one role which has traditionally been its own, that of sea control. Traditionally, the Royal Navy has been principal guarantor of control of the seas around the British Isles, while the RAF has played a very secondary supporting role. However, with the reduction of the Navy's surface fleet announced in The Way Forward, much of that responsibility has gone to the RAF and its TORNADO strike aircraft and NIMROD maritime patrol aircraft. This burden will be shared primarily with the Navy's submarines. Thus the Royal Navy has proven unable to effectively compete for resources even within its own traditional roles.

#### C. COMPETITION WITHIN THE NAVY

Competition for scarce financial resources goes on not only between the services but within the Navy itself. Although the lack of public debate within British policy circles and the small size of the defense establishment make such competition difficult to detect accurately, professional journals and government statements do provide some indication of the dissent over service policy.

One major controversy has surfaced within the Navy as a result of the Government's decision to purchase TRIDENT. A large number of pro-Navy supporters have expressed misgivings that the financial burden of the TRIDENT program would fall entirely on the Navy at the expense of conventional forces.



In 1982, the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Henry Leach, declared the Navy was "being saddled with virtually the whole of the bill for TRIDENT..."<sup>19</sup> This concern has led some navalists to oppose TRIDENT on the grounds that the money would be better spent on conventional naval forces. The Ministry of Defence has even conceded that "...forgoing POLARIS replacement would obviously make it possible to fund additional or earlier force improvements somewhere else."<sup>20</sup> This pro-conventional naval forces opposition to the TRIDENT system has found many sympathizers within the Navy and defense establishment.

However, this opposition to TRIDENT has been rejected by several defense thinkers who have pointed out that cancelling TRIDENT would not necessarily divert those funds to conventional forces. Furthermore, even if the funds were diverted to conventional forces, it is doubtful that they would have a significant impact. After conceding the possibility of diverting funds to those forces, the Ministry of Defence went on to state that "...impressions that we could sustain much larger conventional forces without POLARIS replacement than with it are well wide of the mark."<sup>21</sup> This is because the costs of operating the nuclear forces are very small compared to the costs of operating improved conventional forces. Even the cost of procurement of Trident has been estimated to average only three percent of the defense budget over the time of the program, and no more than



six percent in any one year.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, many Navy supporters have accepted the TRIDENT decision, but are clamoring that the cost of the program be shared by the three services, and not fall on the Navy's shoulders only. How the burden of TRIDENT is shared will remain a matter of perception and, as the program continues, so will the controversy.

Within the Royal Navy's conventional force, resource constraints have forced great change and some competition. These changes have affected force structure, ship design, and the Navy's strategic focus.

The major change in the Navy's force structure which has resulted from increasing resource constraints has been the shift from surface ships to submarines as the Navy's primary combat arm. This change is a result of technological advance, which has given a tremendous advantage to the nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSN) and has made the surface ship seem even more vulnerable. "The power of maritime air systems and submarines in tactical offensive operations is especially apt and telling in our forward geographical situation. But, if we are to maintain and improve these capabilities, we cannot at the same time sustain a surface fleet of the full present size with its heavy overheads, and continue to equip it with ships of the costly sophistication needed for protection in independent operations against the most modern Soviet air-launched and sea-launched missiles and submarines."<sup>23</sup> The extent to which Britain has



accepted the shift can be measured by the fact that it is the only non-superpower currently operating a significant number of SSN's. The Royal Navy is changing from primarily surface into a primarily subsurface fleet.

A second major issue facing the Royal Navy is whether its surface units should be primarily ASW-configured for North Atlantic operations or more general purpose in design to meet any global requirements. Since the retreat from east of Suez began in 1968, the principal theme in British warship construction has been to meet the North Atlantic requirement, though some general purpose capability has been preserved. By the early 1980's, the Royal Navy no longer maintained any large surface units beyond the North Atlantic, but British ships have made cruises beyond European waters, including a show of force in the Arabian Sea during the early days of the Iran-Iraq War. "These limited forms of involvement can represent some of the most economical and cost effective ways of protecting and advancing the United Kingdom's interests outside the NATO area."<sup>24</sup> In spite of this, the Navy's ability to project any effective force beyond Europe was declining until the Falklands War. Since then, the Government has decided to retain some general purpose capability, and has permanently stationed a frigate in the South Atlantic. However, the surface fleet will continue to be optimized for ASW operations in the North Atlantic.





Although many factors and constraints affect and shape British defense policy and the Royal Navy's role in that policy, Britain's severe economic constraints (further enhanced by the political culture of the nation) have been the overwhelming factor in determining both policy and roles. It is largely the economic dilemma that requires the Navy to be cut back to maintain the BAOR, surface forces to be superseded in their traditional roles by aircraft and submarines, and the Navy to give up part of its global capability.

Though the Thatcher Government may offer some prospects for an improved economic situation, it is very unlikely that Britain will be able to sustain a growth rate which will make the present defense effort affordable in the future. Whether the next deep cuts strike the Army, Royal Navy, or Royal Air Force, and how they will affect the roles and missions of the services remains to be seen. Nevertheless, they will have to operate within those constraints. "The future of British defense policy, like its recent past, depends fundamentally on the performance of the British economy."<sup>25</sup>



## FOOTNOTES

1. Ministry of Defence, The United Kingdom Defence Programme: The Way Forward, Cmmd 8288 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, June 1981), p. 8.
2. Heath cited in James Cable, Britain's Naval Future (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1983), p. 150.
3. Lawrence Freedman, "British Defence Policy After the Falklands," World Today (September 1982), p. 331.
4. Laurence W. Martin, "The Domestic Content of British Defense Policy," The Internal Fabric of Western Security, Ed. Gregory Flynn (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 158.
5. Jonathan Alford, "The Choices for British Defense Policy" (In German in Europe Archiv, 1983), p. 3.
6. Cable, p. 21.
7. Winston S. Churchill II. Defending the West (Westport, Ct.: Arlington House, 1981), p. 113.
8. Cable, pp. 24-25.
9. Churchill, p. 113.
10. Ministry of Defence, Statement on the Defence Estimates 1983 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1983), p. 28.
11. Ministry of Defence, The Way Forward, p. 4.
12. David Greenwood, "The Defense Policy of the United Kingdom," The Defense Policies of Nations: A Comparative Study, Ed. Douglas J. Murray and Paul R. Viotti (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1982), p. 204.
13. Ibid., p. 197.
14. Ministry of Defence, The Future United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Force (London: Ministry of Defence Open Government Document 80123 July 1980), p. 17.
15. Martin, p. 154.



16. Ministry of Defence, The Way Forward, p. 6.
17. Ibid, p. 9.
18. Freedman, p. 333.
19. Henry Leach, "British Maritime Force: The Future," RUSI Journal 127, No. 3 (September, 1982), p. 13.
20. Ministry of Defence, The Future Strategic Deterrent, p. 25.
21. Ibid., p. 26.
22. Ministry of Defence, Statement on the Defence Estimates 1982 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1982), p. 6.
23. Ministry of Defence, The Way Forward, p. 8.
24. Ministry of Defence, Defence Estimates 1983, p. 3.
25. Martin, p. 56.



## VII. CONCLUSIONS

Today the Royal Navy faces an uncertain future. After 300 years of naval supremacy, the last forty years have witnessed a massive and deep decline in the Navy's relative capability and power. This decline has been a product of Britain's changing role in the international system, and the growing constraints on British defense resources. Likewise, the future of the Royal Navy will be dependent on the future role of Britain in the world, and on future availability of resources for defense.

The future of Britain's nuclear deterrent and the Navy's role in maintaining that deterrent seem assured, at least in the medium-term. The present Government in London is determined to continue Britain's nuclear role, and is committed to investing the necessary resources to insure it. The choice of TRIDENT to replace POLARIS guarantees the Navy's primary involvement into the next century. A political undercurrent opposed to the nuclear deterrent does exist, but its chances of gaining power in time to stop the TRIDENT program appear poor at present.

Whether Britain will be able to afford TRIDENT is another matter. Despite the determination of the Government and the relatively small portion of defense resources which TRIDENT would require, memory of the dramatic shifts in defense policy





between 1964 and 1968 does not rule out a replay of such a shift by the end of the decade, with TRIDENT as the victim of a new cutback. Britain's economic future is uncertain, but barring any major financial setback, the nation will likely carry out the new SSBN program. The Royal Navy will continue to carry out its role of providing survivable delivery means for Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent.

The Royal Navy's future in the European area is more uncertain. Though Britain remains politically committed to NATO and collective security in Europe, the expression of that commitment is built around ground and air forces in Central Europe rather than naval power. Financial constraints have made maintaining both the forces in Germany and a large fleet very costly. There is some political pressure toward making the British commitment to NATO primarily naval, and giving more attention to the Northern Flank. The Falklands War has served to strengthen this position. However, the present Government has opted to maintain the BAOR, and any shift to a maritime strategy is at present unlikely. The Royal Navy will continue in its present roles as protector of trans-Atlantic shipping lanes and the British Isles, but it will be performing these missions with increasingly smaller forces.

The Royal Navy's global role also faces an uncertain future. Both Britain's role beyond Europe and the Navy's presence there is today very small. Politically, these



geographically distant British commitments are far less important than the European role, and constrained resources make them primary targets for elimination. However, the Falklands War has postponed for a time the final termination of Britain's global role. Ultimately, the naval presence at Hong Kong, the Falklands, Belize, and even Gibraltar will likely be ended. But, for the near future, the Royal Navy will continue to play a small but significant role beyond Europe.

The future of the Royal Navy is uncertain because the future of Britain's political and economic role in the world is uncertain. For over four centuries, though, Britain's survival and security have depended on seapower. Despite the great changes of the recent past, Britain's survival and security today and tomorrow will continue to rest to a major degree on the Royal Navy, and with its future lies the future of Great Britain.



# INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST

	No. Copies
1. Defense Technical Information Center Cameron Station Alexandria, Virginia 22314	2
2. Library, Code 0142 Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California 93943	2
3. Center for Naval Analyses 2000 North Beauregard Street P.O. Box 11280 Alexandria, Virginia 22311	1
4. Department Chairman, Code 56 Department of National Security Affairs Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California 93943	1
5. Professor David S. Yost, Code 56Yo Department of National Security Affairs Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California 93943	1
6. Professor Stephen Garrett, Code 56Ga Department of National Security Affairs Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California 93943	1
7. LT James E. Oldham, USN 1422 S. Church Street Jonesboro, Arkansas 72401	2













297216

Thesis

03696 Oldham

c.1 The Royal Navy and  
British security policy.



The Royal Navy and British security poli



3 2768 000 99951 0

DUDLEY KNOX LIBRARY